

YOUNG MASTER KIRKE

• BY • PENN SHIRLEY •



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“‘How much?’ asked Weezy, while he felt the blades.”

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YOUNG MASTER KIRKE

BY

PENN SHIRLEY

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE MISS WEEZY" "LITTLE MISS WEEZY'S
BROTHER" "LITTLE MISS WEEZY'S SISTER"

Sarah J. Clarke



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YOUNG MASTER KIRKE

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE SILVER GATE	7
II. HOP KEE AND THE NEIGHBORS	17
III. LUNCHING OUT-OF-DOORS	30
IV. "THE MERRY FIVE"	43
V. MANUEL'S MISHAP	55
VI. KIRKE'S AMENDS	68
VII. A PICNIC AT HOME	83
VIII. IN A CHIMNEY	98
IX. BY THE SEA	114
X. THE BURRO EXPRESS	128
XI. KIRKE WRETCHED	136
XII. EVERYBODY HAPPY	150

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

- “ ‘HOW MUCH?’ ASKED WEEZY, WHILE HE FELT
THE BLADES ” *Frontispiece*
- “ KEEP HIM QUIET ? OF COURSE I WILL ” . . *page 61*
- “ OH, I’M STUCK, WEEZY ! I CAN’T MOVE ” . . *page 110*
- “ IT’S MY GRADUATING-DRESS. DON’T CRUSH
IT ” *page 139*

YOUNG MASTER KIRKE

CHAPTER I

THE SILVER GATE

THAT night — the very night that the Rowe family reached Silver Gate City — their hotel was shaken by an earthquake.

“O mamma, mamma, something is tumbling!” shrieked little Miss Weezy, who had felt nothing like this before in all the six years of her life.

“Don’t be frightened, my little daughter,” cried her mother, rushing in from the next room. “It is only the earth rocking.”

“Oh, is that all, mamma? I think the earth is having a pretty hard time turning

over," said Weezy drowsily. And she turned over herself and went to sleep.

The next morning her bright brown eyes were pried open by a sunbeam, and she sprang from the bed to the window, exclaiming, —

"Where is the silver gate, Molly? Please show me the silver gate."

Molly wheeled from the toilet glass with a gay little laugh.

"You funny, funny bit of a sister! Did you suppose there was a real silver gate here with gridiron bars like the one in Shelto's pasture? Why, no, indeed, there isn't! Silver Gate is just the name of this city. They call it the City of the Silver Gate."

"'Thout any gate to it? What makes 'em, Molly? I think they tell a story."

"I'm sure I don't know, Weezy," returned Molly, crossing the room to peep over her

little sister's shoulder; "only you go through a gate to get somewhere. I fancy the bay is the gate; and if you go through it, you get to the Pacific Ocean."

"Oh, isn't the bay blue, Molly!"

"Yes; and do look at those mountains beyond it, Weezy! They're as purple as the English violets in our garden at home!"

"Why, our violets were all squizzled up a long time ago, Molly. Snow on top of 'em too."

"Of course. Oh, wasn't it freezing cold at Gallatin last Tuesday when we came away!" shivered Molly, as she buttoned Weezy's dress.

"Cold as ice; and here it's as warm as — as oatmeal pudding," responded Weezy, beginning to be hungry.

"I should say it was! And see those lovely yellow roses down on the lawn; great trees of them, Weezy Rowe! Why, it seems as if we must be dreaming."

For that matter Molly had felt in a sort of a dream ever since she and Kirke and Weezy returned from their grandfather's in the fall. First had come their papa's serious illness, when they had been told to go about the house on tiptoe, and their mamma had looked so grave. After papa was out of danger, their uncle, Dr. Wyman, had desired him to spend the winter in a milder climate; and later still, it had been decided to take the whole family to Southern California.

Well, they had bidden good-by to New England; and here they were, — Mr. and Mrs. Rowe, Molly, Kirke, Weezy, and baby Donald, — a good half dozen, as Master Kirke said, safe and sound on the Pacific coast.

"Pity we had to leave my pony behind," went on Molly, aroused from her dreaming by a Mexican boy cantering past the hotel on a rough-haired bronco. "Dear old Shelto! I wonder how he'll fancy Jerusha Runnell for a mistress."

"I wish we could have taken Bruno," sighed Weezy, batting at a troublesome fly. "Bruno is the bestest dog in the wide, wide world. I hope Uncle Doctor 'll give him oceans of beefsteak. He likes beefsteak, my Bruno does."

"Papa is going to buy Donald a dog, you know," said Molly, settling in place her sister's round comb.

Weezy had sunny hair full of waves and ripples, and the comb above it made one think of a bridge across a sparkling waterfall.

"Yes, papa is going to buy Donald a dog; and he's going to buy me a rabbit," cried Weezy, her eyes dancing. "And by and by he'll buy Kirke a bu-reau."

"*Burro*, Weezy," corrected Molly. "They call these donkeys out here burros."

"Burro, then. I wish I could ride this minute."

"We shall have a carriage after breakfast,

and drive about the city to look for a house to live in."

"Oh, goody, goody!"

"Yes; we shall take a carriage, and we shall try to find a Chinaman to do our cooking"

"A Chinaman to cook? Hoh, Molly Rowe; you're just a-funning. Men don't cook; men chop wood and things."

"Sometimes they cook too. Yesterday, on the train, papa heard of a man that cooks elegantly. He lives here in Chinatown. His name is Hop Kee!"

"Hop — what?" asked Weezy, opening her eyes.

"Hop Kee. We shall hunt him up this forenoon if papa is well enough."

Weezy clapped her hands. "Oh, I'm so glad! S'pose he'll make me cunning little *turnippers* with apple in, like Lovisa does?"

At the home in Gallatin there had never been a man cook; and Weezy was very curious

to see this Hop Kee, whose name sounded to her just like a sneeze.

"I dare say he'll make 'turnippers' and pies and cakes and everything nice," replied Molly, drying her wet fingers on a towel. "There, I'm ready; let's go into mamma's parlor."

Master Kirke, now a wide-awake, manly boy, not quite twelve, was waiting for them.

Weezy ran to kiss him. "Oh, did you feel the big earth turn 'round in the night, Kirke? I did; truly I did. It joggled and joggled just like mamma's hush-a-by chair."

Kirke laughed. He usually laughed at his little sister's remarks. He thought her the drollest wee maiden that ever lived.

"No; I didn't hear anything, Weezy. I guess 'twas your head that turned around," said he, springing to open the door for his papa.

Mr. Rowe walked in leaning upon a cane,

and Mrs. Rowe followed with the baby. Then breakfast was served in their private parlor; and after breakfast the carriage was announced.

"We're going to see the sneezy man. Oh, isn't it lovely?" exclaimed frisky Miss Weezy, as she snuggled into the back seat beside her mamma. "Wish Kisty Nye could see him."

All the way to Chinatown, Weezy asked questions about Hop Kee; and when the horses stopped at his whitewashed cabin, and he actually appeared upon the threshold grinning and wagging his head like the china mandarin on the mantel at Gallatin, she stared at him as if he, too, had been made of china.

"What for does he braid his hair so tight, Molly?" she whispered. "He's pulled his eyes way up."

"Hush, he'll hear you," said Molly, trying not to smile.

But Hop Kee was looking toward Kirke,

who, after knocking at the door, had remained standing upon the threshold, and now asked, —

“Is this Hop Kee? Can you come out, please, and speak to my father?”

“Allee yight,” returned the Chinaman bowing for the sixth time, and scuffling to the carriage in his queer-toed slippers.

His long cue kept whipping his legs as he walked, and Weezy thought it must hurt them. She could not understand all that was said; but after they had driven on, Kirke told her that Hop Kee had promised to come on trial for a month to work in their kitchen.

“But we haven’t any kitchen for him to work in,” said she anxiously.

“No, not yet; but we shall have one by noon, young lady, and a dining-room into the bargain,” replied Kirke, with gay confidence.

If the lad had supposed that it would be as easy to choose a home as to select a jack-knife, he soon discovered his error. They

looked at large houses and at small houses; at houses too fine, and at houses not fine enough, yet at luncheon time were as far as ever from finding just the house they wanted.

"Oh, it's too bad," sighed Miss Weezy, dragging little Donald by one hand up the steps of the hotel. "What'll Mr. Hop Kee do 'thout any kitchen? He can't make me any cunning little turnippers — for my seven-years-old birthday."

Molly stooped to kiss her troubled young sister.

"Don't fret, sweetheart. Do you know that when the birthday comes you'll be more than half as old as I am? Great girls like you mustn't cry."

CHAPTER II

HOP KEE AND THE NEIGHBORS

AFTER searching several days for a home, Mr. and Mrs. Rowe at last found upon Vista Heights one that pleased them. It was a large, cream-colored cottage with three sunny bay-windows, and a broad veranda protected from the wind by glass.

"I suppose there's a roof to this house," said Molly, the morning they moved in; "but I can't see it for the climbing roses."

She was helping her mamma in unpacking the valises and trunks when Hop Kee mounted the back porch with a lumpy-looking rice-bag on his shoulders. Weezy ran to let him in, and watched with eager curiosity while he emptied the contents of the bag upon the

pantry table. In the heap she spied a rolling-pin, a biscuit-cutter, an egg-beater, and various other articles used by Hop Kee in cooking.

"My mamma has things just like those," said she.

Hop Kee nodded, and replied with a grin, —

"Me blingee him allee samee."

Then he hung his dark blue frock behind the kitchen door, and drew on a frock of white linen.

"I shouldn't think men would like to wear long-sleeved aprons," remarked Weezy socially, facing Hop Kee, with her back against the sink.

Hop Kee said nothing. He was putting on a white paper cap which covered his hair all but the cue. Weezy observed that he had tied this cue in a tight bunch at the nape of his neck, and wound it about with narrow blue ribbon.

"Come out here, won't you, Weezy, to play

with Donald," called Kirke at this moment from the yard.

"Pretty soon," she answered, lingering.

She wanted very much to know why Hop Kee let his hair grow so long, and braided stocking-yarn into it. Oh, if she only dared ask him! Finally she could not wait another second, but inquired bluntly, —

"Why don't you have somebody cut your hair off, Mr. Hop Kee? *I* would."

The Chinaman tapped his forehead, shaved nearly to the crown of his head, and cried, "Looke, Misse."

"I didn't mean there, on *top*, Mr. Hop Kee," responded Weezy rather impatiently. "I meant *there*, behind." And she pointed to his tied-up cue. "Please tell me, Mr. Hop Kee, what makes you wear that funny thing."

His slanting eyes showed annoyance. "China king makee," he answered after a

pause. Then he added briskly, "No talkee allee timee."

Weezy knew as well as anybody that she had not been polite in asking Hop Kee such questions, and she now made haste to join Kirke who was again calling her. He wished her to see the stable in which he had discovered a dove-cote, and a stall for a burro. Just then it was the height of his ambition to possess one of those droll, patient little animals; and he was to have one if he performed his tasks cheerfully. His papa had promised.

The task at present most trying to himself and to Molly was that of amusing the baby; and this morning he had been playing horse with the child a full half hour.

"If Donald wasn't so cross I wouldn't mind," said he, after he had shown Weezy the wonders of the stable. He mumbled the words, because of the worsted reins in

his teeth. Donald held the other end of the reins, and had driven Kirke around to the front veranda where Molly was vainly trying to shake out the creases in her best dress.

"I think he misses Ellen," remarked Molly. Ellen Nolan had been Donald's nurse-girl at Gallatin.

"Mamma says he's getting more teeth," responded Kirke, prancing to and fro at his young brother's bidding.

"You have teeth enough now, Donny, sister thinks," cried Weezy, snatching a kiss as the little teamster toddled by. "You don't eat hardly anything, only just milk."

"Oo 'top," snarled Donald, his mouth beginning to pucker as if it were drawn with a string.

"Don't, Weezy; don't stir him up, for pity's sake," entreated Kirke, as though he were speaking of a caged hyena. "He mustn't wake papa."

Ever since their father's illness this had been the cry. Donald must be kept quiet at whatever cost; and the baby had been petted till he was fast becoming a tyrant.

"See, Donny! see that funny, yellow old man coming up street," said Weezy, in a wheedling tone. "Hear him ringing his bell. Look! he's leading a brown old donkey with a cart."

"Dap! Dap!" cried Donald, smoothing the puckers from his lips, and beginning to back down the veranda steps for a nearer view of this new wonder.

Kirke bolted after his little charge, tripped in the reins, tangled himself, untangled himself, and in the end reached the pavement only just in time to snatch Donald from beneath the front hoofs of the burro.

The driver uttered some exclamation in Italian, and backed the animal away from the child.

"Baby's frightened; baby isn't hurt," cried Kirke, stooping to lift his shrieking little brother.

The man fixed his great black eyes upon the two, then nodded and smiled. He had not understood Kirke's words; but he could see for himself that no harm had been done.

"Knife, scissors, sharp?" he asked, waving the bell in his hand toward a big grindstone in the cart.

"Tell him yes, Kirke; mamma wants some shears ground, I'm sure," called Molly, hurrying into the house.

The Italian nodded a second time, and fastened his burro to the iron negro boy that served as a hitching-post.

"Can't that man talk, Kirke?" whispered Weezy at her brother's elbow.

"Not much, — not English," replied Kirke, putting down the baby.

The little fellow had ceased sobbing to

stare at the stranger, who drew from the cart a tall stool, and having seated himself upon this, rested his feet upon two treadles underneath his odd vehicle.

"He's a funny old man to sit down in the road," continued Weezy, in the same low tone.

She paused suddenly, and moved aside for a lad who had crossed from the opposite house.

"Good-morning," said the lad in a friendly voice; "you are *tenderfeet*, aren't you? I thought so. You don't look tanned like I do."

Weezy noticed that his face was very red, and his hair very light, as if it had been bleached by the sun. It was plain to her that the young stranger was tanned; but it was not plain why he had called Kirke and herself "*tenderfeet*."

She had not heard that in California all

new-comers from the East are nicknamed tenderfeet.

"We're from Massachusetts," said Kirke; "and we've rented this house for a year."

"That's good. We live right over the way. My name's Paul, — Paul Bradstreet."

"And my name is Kirke Rowe," returned Kirke promptly. "This little girl here is my sister Louise; and the little boy is my brother."

"Dap! Dap!" cried Donald, pointing his short forefinger at the burro.

"Donald calls everything 'Dap' that goes on four legs," explained Kirke. Then, as Molly appeared, he added, "there, this is Molly, my other sister!"

Molly bowed bashfully, thinking how rude it was in Kirke not to tell her the name of the white-headed lad. She held in her hand three pairs of dull shears, and she passed them at once to the Italian.

"How much?" asked she, while he felt the blades.

"Three piece. Fifteen cent."

"Very well; you may sharpen them all," said Molly, delighted with the bargain; for her mamma had expected to pay a quarter of a dollar.

The scissors-grinder began to work the treadles; the treadles began to twirl the band; the band began to move the wheel; the wheel began to turn the grindstone; and the grindstone began to whet the steel. Meanwhile the children of the neighborhood gathered around the cart to see what was going on, and the donkey went to sleep,—drooping his great wings of ears lower and lower, till even little Donald could behold their white linings.

"Burro's 'ead is 'eavy, don't you s'pose?" asked one rosy-cheeked urchin, pulling at Weezy's frock.

"Who is that queer-talking little kid?" whispered Kirke to Paul.

"That? Oh, that's Harry Hobbs, a little English boy that lives in the green-house round the corner. He's forever dropping h's, and putting them on where they don't belong. Calls himself 'Arry 'Obbs; and his fat little sister Essie there beside him, he calls Hessie!"

"Does his mother talk that way?" queried Molly, who had overheard.

"His Aunt Ruth does. He and Essie live with her. Their mother is dead."

"Poor little things! I hope their aunt is good to them."

"Oh, yes; she's good as pie,—just about. I mean she's *crusty*," returned Paul, drawing down his face.

Molly moved away to speak to the strangely dressed, dumpy little orphans; and Kirke took occasion to question Paul on a subject near his heart, namely,—fishing. Did Paul know

where there were any brooks? Would he go trouting?

Paul laughed.

"Why, we don't have brooks about here in the dry season; and the river runs bottom side up. We might hire a boat, though, and fish in the bay."

"Papa doesn't want me to go out in a boat till he's well enough to go with me," replied Kirke soberly.

"Oh! I tell you what we can do. We can take the train for La Jolla some day, and see the seine-fishing. That'll be great fun."

"Molly and I'll go with you, perhaps," said Weezy sweetly.

"It wouldn't be a bad plan to take the girls along," cried Paul; "and Pauline is always ready for a lark. Pauline's my sister. She's thirteen, and so'm I. We're twins, you know."

Long after the scissors-grinder had finished his work and led away the drowsy burro, the

boys kept on talking ; and they were still talking when Hop Kee came to say that luncheon was served.

As Kirke entered the dining-room, Molly looked up reproachfully, —

“It was your turn this morning to take care of Donald,” she said ; “and you never gave him so much as a drink of water after that boy came. Don’t you think you’ve been *shirky* ?”

“Sort of, maybe,” admitted he with a shrug. “But you mustn’t count it in, Molly. I was having a jolly time with Paul Bradstreet. He has been telling me about some of his father’s voyages. His father is a sea-captain, but hasn’t been abroad since Paul’s mother died.”

CHAPTER III

LUNCHING OUT-OF-DOORS

PAULINE BRADSTREET put on her best hat the very next afternoon, and came over to call upon Molly.

"I'm so glad to think you are going to live in this house," she said cordially, as she shook hands. "Paul is sure I shall like you."

"I hope you will," answered Molly, blushing, and twirling her ring.

"Paul and I nearly always like the same people," continued Pauline, who had seen more of the world than Molly, and was not bashful in the least.

"Maybe that's because you're twins," suggested Molly.

"Maybe it is; but isn't it queer that we look so different? I'm so black, and Paul is so white,—where he isn't red, I mean. He burnt his face to a blister yesterday, riding pony-back to the Old Mission."

"What a pity! I'm always blistering my face, and Kirke is always teasing me about it. Does your brother tease you?"

"He tries, but it isn't much fun; I pretend not to care. I *was* vexed though, to have him go by himself to the Mission, when papa would have taken us both in the surrey."

"Is the Mission very, very old?" asked Molly, beginning to feel at her ease.

"Old? yes, indeed. It was built more than a hundred years ago," chattered Pauline, watching the sunbeams at play in Molly's auburn braids. "Some time I'll get papa to drive us all out there."

She was as good as her word; and a few days later brought her father to visit his

new neighbors, and arrange an excursion for the following Saturday.

Promptly at nine o'clock on the morning appointed, Captain Bradstreet drove up to Mr. Rowe's side door in a three-seated russet surrey, drawn by two russet horses in russet leather harnesses.

"We're all ready, Captain Bradstreet, all but Kirke, and he isn't much *unready*," cried Weezy, fluttering down the steps in a cardinal woollen dress and a broad-brimmed hat of cardinal felt.

"That suits me. I'm rough and ready myself," returned the bluff captain, helping the two sisters to the middle seat in front of Paul and Pauline.

"Where's the picnic?" queried Weezy, peering sharply about.

"Allee yight," cried Hop Kee, shuffling along from the kitchen with a large luncheon basket in his hand.

"It's good and heavy, Hop. Hope you've put in the caramel cake," said Kirke, coming out buttoning his jacket.

Hop Kee grinned from ear to ear, but all he said was "Good-by."

"I believe 'good-by' is the only English he is sure of," remarked Molly gayly, as he politely backed himself into the screened porch. "Do you see, Pauline, how he has wound his cue around his head to-day? It looks like a little turban."

"The Chinamen are apt to twist their cues up that way when they're at work," answered Pauline, making room for the basket between herself and Paul.

"And when they're out in the wind they sometimes tie them round their hats to keep them on," said Paul.

"To keep what on, Paul?—their cues?" asked Pauline demurely.

"No; their hats, Miss Stupid. By the way,

does anybody know where the Chinamen got the notion of wearing pigtails?"

"Hop Kee said the China king made 'em wear them," laughed Molly as the horses started; "but I've heard 'twas the Tartars ages ago."

"I wouldn't have worn a pigtail for anybody," cried Kirke fiercely. "No, sir; I wouldn't have worn a pigtail if they'd cut my head off."

"After they'd cut your head off how *could* you have worn a pigtail?" retorted Paul, amid a chorus of laughter at Kirke's expense.

"You mustn't mind my boy's fun, Master Kirke. Paul is a blunt fellow like his old father," observed Captain Bradstreet, with a fond glance at his son, whom he closely resembled; only his skin was redder than Paul's, and his hair whiter.

"Oh! Kirke can stand a joke, papa," said Paul. "He isn't a molly-coddle."

"Isn't he, Molly? That's for you to say," retorted Pauline archly.

She was looking at a small brown cottage by the wayside, half concealed behind tomato vines that sprawled to the roof.

"That's where Mrs. Carillo lives, Molly," she went on; "the Spanish woman I told you about who sells such exquisite drawn-work. See, there's Manuel staking out the cow."

"What a handsome boy, Pauline! Is he Mrs. Carillo's son?"

"Why, yes; he's a newsboy. Haven't you met him?" asked Pauline in a tone of surprise, as they began to descend the grade into the canyon. "Hold on tight, Weezy, when we go around that bend in the road."

At sight of the narrow highway winding down the hillside like a spiral staircase without balusters, Weezy clung to Molly crying; while Molly shrank to her own end of the

seat, which was on the side of the road hollowed into the cliff.

"There's nothing down here only just air, Molly," exclaimed Weezy, peeping over the outer wheel.

"Don't look, Weezy, dear; it makes me dizzy to see you," entreated Molly, grasping her little sister's arm.

"You won't be so dizzy when we get a little lower," said Paul kindly, seeing how pale Molly's face was under the navy-blue hat.

"Unless you go head first, Molly," added mischievous Kirke, snatching at the limb of a tobacco-tree that leaned above the abyss.

Ah, Kirke had sad reason afterward to remember that tree, with its branches drooping just out of reach, and yellow with trumpet-shaped blossoms! But at this moment he was bent on teasing Molly. He could not understand why she should be giddy in high places. He and Weezy never were giddy.

"I'm not dizzy a bit," said Weezy presently; "only I'm afraid the horses will turn *somersits* down the cannon!"

"Don't fret about my horses, little girl," responded Captain Bradstreet cheerily. "I'll keep them right side up."

"Will you? Oh! then I don't care. What makes the road wiggle so, Captain Bradstreet?"

"The road wiggles, my dear, because the hill wiggles; but in a few minutes we shall be in the valley."

They soon entered a level highway, skirting orchards of oranges, lemons, and figs, and presently crossing what seemed to be a bed of gravel with a pool in the middle.

"This is the first mud-puddle we've found in California," remarked Molly innocently, as the horses stopped to drink.

"Puddle!" shouted Paul and Pauline in a breath. "Why this is the Silver Gate River. We're at the ford!"

How they all laughed! Kirke said if they called that a ford, he'd like to show them the one near his grandfather's parsonage, where the water would cover the hubs of the wagon-wheels.

"It'll cover the whole wheels here, tires and all, after the winter rains come," returned Paul, as soon as he could speak for giggling; "but in the dry season the river hides itself."

"What do folks do with their boats then?" asked Weezy, as they drove on.

"Do without 'em, Pussy," answered Paul airily. "Look, there is the Old Mission on the hill, beyond the olive grove."

"That big brown thing? I don't think it's a bit pretty," remarked Weezy, with her usual candor.

"Nevertheless, some people consider it a very interesting ruin," said Captain Bradstreet playfully. "Perhaps, little Miss Weezy, you

don't know that the Indians helped to build that Mission?"

"Did they, Captain Bradstreet? What for?" As if she wondered they should have taken the trouble.

"Oh, for a church, and for a school, and for other things that I can't explain to you, my dear. Good Father Junipero and a few other Spanish monks planned the building, and aided in making it."

"The poor old monks must have had their hands full," said Paul, when they had alighted in front of the Mission. "I suppose the Indians didn't know B from a broomstick."

"Hush, Paul! oh, hush! those boys will think you mean them," whispered Pauline.

The boys in question were a troop of straight-haired, brown-skinned youths, just dismissed from the schoolhouse near by.

"One little, two little, three little Indians,"

murmured Kirke softly. "I've a great mind to ask them how they like fractions."

"You'll have to speak Indian then, or Spanish," said Paul wisely. "Come, don't fool with them; I move we have something to eat."

"I second the motion," cried Kirke, dragging the baskets from the surrey.

While the russet horses munched barley straw in a neighboring stable, the girls spread a white table-cloth upon the grass beside the crumbling adobe wall, and made ready the dinner.

"Oh, how *exquit!*" exclaimed Weezy, tipping over the guava jelly in trying to assist; "Sal Lunn and turnippers, and frostin'-cake, and — oh — oh — sugar kisses. I want some of Hop Kee's sugar kisses!"

"You must have a sandwich first," said Molly, tucking a napkin under Weezy's chin in a motherly way. "And here comes

Captain Bradstreet with a pitcher of new milk."

"Let me fill your cups," cried the captain blithely. "We'll drink to the memory of Father Junipero."

"The unearthly good priest who planted that orange orchard yonder," said Kirke, holding out his glass.

"The olive orchard that is the mother of all the others in California," added Paul, laughing.

Then the party touched glasses and drank together; after which they despatched their luncheon with remarkable appetites.

"Now we go into the Indian girls' school to write our names in the visitors' book," said Captain Bradstreet, when Pauline had folded the table-cloth, and Kirke had put the baskets in the carriage.

"Me too?" asked Weezy.

"Certainly, if you wish," answered the captain smiling.

Weezy did wish it very decidedly ; and before they went home she had signed her name beneath the others in the large ledger. There it stands to this day, in great, uneven capitals, "Louise Rowe, Gallatin, Mass."

CHAPTER IV

"THE MERRY FIVE"

"WE'RE going to Mexico! —to Mex-i-co!" sang Weezy, dancing backward down the street.

"Hear the kid! You'd think she was going to Jericho," cried Kirke, following behind with Molly, Paul, and Pauline. They had named themselves "The Merry Five," and were setting out on an important quest, —a quest for a dog.

To be sure, the Rowe children already had collected quite a menagerie. Molly had a frisky yellow kitten named Ginger; Kirke rejoiced in pigeons of various species; and Weezy owned three funny horned toads, besides Snowdrop, a beautiful white rabbit. But

what of these, so long as little Donald was destitute of pets? Kirke, especially, felt it highly necessary to buy his brother a certain hairless Mexican dog that Paul Bradstreet knew about; and in order to make this purchase, it took Paul, Pauline, Molly, Weezy, and himself, and a ride on the steam motor to Tia Juana, a little town half in California and half in Mexico. "The Merry Five" had chosen Saturday for the expedition, because it was a holiday; and they now all went to school.

"You'll be floating in the air yet if we don't look out, little Miss Weezy," said Paul, when they had reached the station, and he was helping her into the open car. "Next time I fly my kite I must tie you to it, and it'll be sure to go up."

"Yes; Weezy 'd make a pretty good *Bob*," cried Kirke mischievously. "She's a regular *Bob-o-link*."

Pauline laughed gayly, as if he had said the

brightest thing in the world. It was as natural for her to laugh as for a full tea-kettle to boil over. When the engine whistled hoarsely, and Kirke remarked that it had taken cold, she laughed again. The others joined in, and they whizzed away toward Mexico in the gayest of spirits. Paul knew the road well, and acted as showman.

"Do you see that tall Monterey cypress in front of the brown house?" he asked presently, as they rumbled by a thrifty orange ranch. "Our minister preached under that one Sunday last summer."

"And don't you remember what a crowd there was, Paul?" interrupted Pauline, pinning up a rent in her skirt; "and how they all got their chairs under the shade of that tree?"

"Yes; and papa told us the cypress was only twenty-five years old."

"It's very large of its age," remarked Molly dryly.

On they rattled ; past fragrant orange orchards, where water was running in little furrows between the rows of trees ; past "truck patches," where blue-frocked Chinamen were digging among their vegetables ; and so on to brown, rugged hillsides.

"I smell southernwood," sniffed Weezy.

"They call that 'old man' here," said Paul ; "and those clumsy, bristly things yonder are prickly pears."

"We saw those in Mission Valley," cried Molly. "They're regular out-of-doors pin-cushions."

"They bear pins all the year round, and pears in the summer," returned Paul, picking up Pauline's pocket-handkerchief.

"Good to eat ?" asked Weezy.

"Ye-es ; if you like 'em. There ! 'twon't be long before we see Aunt Jane."

"Are we going to see your Aunt Jane, Paul ?" cried Weezy in surprise. "Molly said we were just going to Mexico."

"Well, we are going to Mexico. Aunt Jane lives in Mexico; that is, part of her lives there."

"Paul is only joking, Weezy," laughed Pauline, as the motor stopped at the end of the line. "He's talking about Tia Juana. Tia Juana is the Spanish name for Aunt Jane."

"I think 'Aunt Jane' might be tidier," said Molly in disgust.

They were alighting in a sand-bank; and besides two or three tired-looking houses there was nothing to see except some beach-wagons with horses attached to them.

"This is the American side of 'Aunt Jane;' the Mexican side is across the river," explained Paul, leading Weezy to the largest wagon, near which stood Reuben, the mulatto guide.

Reuben was beckoning and shouting, "This way, ladies and gentlemen, to Mexico, the

post-office, the custom-house, and the curio store! This way, ladies and gentlemen, to Mexico!"

Weezy's eyes sparkled. Mexico was just what she wanted to see.

"That man's a bouncer, Molly, isn't he?" whispered Kirke, as the four horses plunged forward through the sand. "His sombrero would smother a bonfire."

"What possesses him to wear that red-white-and-green ribbon on his coat?" asked Molly.

"Oh, that's a badge!" said Paul. "Those are the Mexican colors, you know."

They were now crossing a shallow stream, which Paul informed them was the Tia Juana River; and in the time it takes to tell it they had reached the further shore.

"Hurrah!" shouted Kirke, waving his hat; "we've left the United States behind us! We're in Mexico!"

Weezy did not join in the shout. She was ready to cry from disappointment. "Why, Mexico looks like anywhere else!" she exclaimed; "only it looks ever so much worse! I thought we should have to climb over a fence, or go across a bridge, or something!"

While Paul and Kirke ran off to find the dog's master, the girls kept on in the barge to the post-office. Here Molly bought a Mexican stamp, and mailed a letter which she had written the day before to her friend Lucy Dutton.

After that they all went to the custom-house to have their handkerchiefs stamped with the Mexican coat-of-arms; and thence to the curio store, where Pauline would have spent all the money in her purse, had not Reuben appeared with the wagon at the moment he did. Paul and Kirke had already taken their seats, and Kirke held by the collar the coveted little dog.

"Oh, oh! isn't he queer?" cried Weezy.

"He's too comical for anything," chimed in Molly. "What's his name, Kirke?"

"Zip."

"Looks as if they'd shaved him, and then rubbed him with sandpaper!" exclaimed Pauline. "Not a hair on him, except that little tuft at the tip of his tail."

"He's a homely little beast, all but his tail," said Kirke.

"What if he is?" retorted Paul. "They say, 'All's well that ends well.' And then they laughed in chorus over the new purchase; and agreed that however bright and winning his dogship might be, he certainly was not handsome.

After they had entered the motor, a young Mexican boy came in with a tray of what looked liked twists of wet corn-husks. Paul bought several of these, and passed them around.

"Hot *tomallis*; taste," said he, tearing one open for Weezy.

"I don't want to," cried she, drawing back.

"How rude, Weezy, when Paul bought them for us!" whispered Molly in her ear.

"They're good, *I* think," said Kirke, eating his own with relish. "What's in 'em, anyhow, Paul?"

"Chicken and Indian meal. Then they're boiled, — oh, yes, and chilli."

"*Chilly* do you call 'em? Now, *I* call 'em *hot*!" exclaimed Kirke, pretending not to know that by chilli Paul had meant red pepper.

And then all laughed again at the silly little play upon words, because all were so jolly.

"I motion that we go to La Jolla next Saturday," said Paul an hour later, as "The Merry Five" were about to separate.

But Molly shook her head.

"It wouldn't be fair to ask mamma. She

hasn't found any nurse-girl yet, and Donald is as cross as a bear."

"Can't Harry Hobbs play with him?"

"Oh, Harry is too little to be trusted!"

"I know what'll be nice," interrupted Weezy. "For us to go on my birthday."

"Will it come on a Saturday? Are you sure?"

"Yes, *sure*. Mamma said so. Mamma looked it up in the *colander*."

"Did she, Weezy? Then of course she must know," returned Pauline, with a sly wink at the other three; and Weezy never suspected that she should have said "calendar."

The little blunderer had turned aside to look at the handsome newspaper carrier then approaching.

"Manuel Carillo is a very quick boy," she said, watching while he rolled up a newspaper and threw it at the house opposite them.

"He's a good fellow, let me tell you," observed Paul. "By the way, Kirke, I wonder if he won't know who'll sell you a burro? I'll ask him, now I think of it."

"I wish you would," replied Kirke eagerly.

Paul was so kind and "chummy," he thought. Of Manuel he never thought at all. It never occurred to Kirke that of the two lads, Paul Bradstreet would really have less to do with his life in California than Manuel Carillo, the Spanish boy.

"Manuel is getting around with his papers early to-day," remarked Pauline, as Paul darted across the street. "I'm afraid his mother is sick again."

"My papa was sick once," put in Weezy; "awful sick with *ammonia*."

"Oh, Mrs. Carillo isn't so ill as that," returned Pauline lightly; "but she brings on hard headaches by doing yards and yards of fine embroidery. There! Manuel is hurrying along."

“He has heard of a burro, Kirke!” cried Paul, rushing back. “He says if you’ll go over to his house in the morning he’ll tell you about it.”

“Bravo! I’ll be at the canyon before breakfast.”

“Then don’t make a great racket in getting up, Kirke, and wake everybody,” pleaded Molly, halting in front of Captain Bradstreet’s door. “Good-by, Paul. Good-by, Pauline.”

“Bow-wow-wow,” barked Zip.

“Wait a second, please,” cried Paul, gently laying hold of Molly’s long braid. “Before we break up the party, let’s have a rousing cheer for ‘The Merry Five.’ ”

“Agreed,” answered Kirke, swinging his hat. And all shouted together, three times over, —

“T-h-e—M-e-r-r-y—F-i-v-e,
Ha-ha-ha!”

CHAPTER V

MANUEL'S MISHAP

ZIP, the little Mexican dog, was not homesick himself, but from the moment of his arrival at his new home he made Snowdrop as homesick as possible. He delighted in frisking about the rabbit's pen, and barking till the timid white creature trembled with fright.

"And Snowdrop never answers him back, either. Isn't Zip real naughty?" Weezy would cry indignantly, and drive the dog away.

Donald, also, was less pleased with his gift than had been hoped. He did not know what to make of a quadruped with a bark so rough and a skin so smooth, quite as smooth as that of Hop Kee. In fact, for the first day or two the baby was afraid of Zip. But when he saw

how Molly and Kirke and Weezy stroked the dog without being hurt, he said, —

“Doggie — no — bite — baby;” and even attempted to pat Zip’s cold little nose.

After this the two became friends, and ran many races together around the foot of the windmill.

“Zip likes Donald; but he likes Kirke a great deal better. I say that isn’t fair when Kirke isn’t his master,” mused Weezy one morning, not long after the trip to Mexico.

She was riding her new tricycle, and would have been glad of Zip’s company. It piqued her that he had preferred to tear off to the canyon with Kirke and Hoppity, the newly purchased burro.

For, thanks to Manuel Carillo, Kirke now had his heart’s desire, — a burro and cart.

He had owned the burro exactly thirty-five hours, and had shown it to as many of his acquaintances as daylight had permitted; and

this morning he felt it to be his duty, as well as his pleasure, to show it to Mrs. Carillo, whom he had met several times. It was to her house that he was jogging on Hoppity's back.

Mrs. Carillo was well again, and Kirke was to ask her to make his mother a dozen finger-bowl napkins of the Mexican drawn-work. When he reached the entrance of the canyon, Mrs. Carillo spied him from her window behind the thrifty tomato-vines, and nodded and smiled. She was a small, charming Spanish woman, who could speak little English, but seemed to talk with her hands and her beautiful black eyes.

"Sew? Oh, yes; I sew all the days," she said presently, after she had admired the burro to Kirke's satisfaction, and Kirke had made her understand his mother's errand. "Gladly, oh, yes, gladly will I work for the mamma."

Then in her pretty, broken way she went

on to tell Kirke that her eyes were getting tired with the so many fine stitches. Some day, when she and the dear Manuel had saved oh, so much money, they might buy a machine for the sewing, to rest the so tired eyes. He was a good boy, her Manuel. Oh, yes! He sold the papers every afternoon, and brought to her the silver. Already it was a pile — so high — in the saucer under the blue bowl.

Dearly as Kirke loved to listen to Mrs. Carillo, he was to-day impatient to exercise Hoppity; and at the first pause he said good-by, and dashed on down the canyon, where Manuel was gathering dry twigs to boil the beans for dinner.

“Come and ride on my new burro, Manuel,” he shouted. “Jump up behind me, and try him.”

“He’s fine,” laughed Manuel, — the boy had his mother’s trick of laughing, — and he

dropped his armful of wood, and sprang upon the burro.

Hoppity shook his wise old head, as if to say that two boys on his back were one too many; but Kirke did not heed him. Kirke knew that the donkey was a strong little animal, used to heavy burdens.

"If I had a switch I'd tickle him," cried he, urging him along to the tobacco-tree they had passed in going to the Old Mission. "I'll see if I can't break one off this lower branch."

"Don't believe you can reach," returned Manuel, who had learned English at a Roman Catholic school.

"I can try, anyway," said Kirke, halting under the tree, which grew on the outer edge of the road, next a precipice at least twenty feet deep. As he spoke, he clutched at the branch, but found it higher than it had appeared.

"I must stand up," he cried, mounting upon the saddle.

"Take care; you'll fall!" exclaimed Manuel.

"No, I sha'n't."

"The burro may start."

"Pooh! Who's afraid?" returned venture-some Kirke. Not himself, surely. He was as agile as a mountain goat. "I can't tear off a twig, though," he added, after several vain efforts. "I'm not quite tall enough. You try, Manuel. You can do it; your arm is longer."

Manuel looked over into the canyon and shrugged his shoulders.

"We're too near the edge of the road."

"Pooh! 'twon't take you two seconds, Manuel."

"No; I don't dare."

"Don't dare!" mimicked Kirke, flopping into the stirrups in great scorn. "Before I'd be such a coward, Manuel Carillo!"



"Keep him quiet? Of course I will."

Oh, what would not Kirke have given a moment later if he could have taken back those words!

They aroused Manuel's hot Spanish temper, and he struggled to his feet, shouting, —

“I'm not a coward; but I don't know your old burro yet, Kirke Rowe. Keep the ugly fellow quiet, will you?”

“Keep him quiet? of course I will!” answered Kirke quickly, forgetting that it takes two to make a bargain, and that Hoppity had not been consulted. Perhaps the wise little beast objected to the boy's securing a switch to whip him with; or it may be that he objected simply to the nails in Manuel's stout shoes. I only know this; that the instant Manuel stood up, Hoppity suddenly started, and pitched him heels over head down the precipice!

Poor, poor Manuel! And wretched, wretched Kirke! Who now was more afraid than he?

Leaping to the roadside, he shouted into the depths beneath, "Are you hurt, Manuel? Tell me, are you hurt? Oh, mercy me! why don't you answer?"

The response was a loud groan from Manuel far below, doubled up under a clump of wild gooseberry-bushes. Kirke ran along the highway to an easier slope, and slid down to him, crying, —

"Where did you hurt you, Manuel? Oh, did you break anything?"

"My leg, Kirke. I've broken my leg," wailed Manuel, making a vain attempt to rise.

"Oh, no! that can't be; I don't believe it!" gasped Kirke, frightened nearly out of his wits. "You've bruised it awfully, you know; but you can't have broken it! You don't really think it's broken?"

He was even paler than Manuel, and Manuel was as pale as the darkness of his skin would allow.

"Oh, I can't move my leg, Kirke!" he cried. "I say I can't move it. Oh, do bring mamma!"

"Yes, yes; I will. I'll bring your mamma; I'll bring the doctor; I'll bring everybody. Oh, oh, it was all my fault, Manuel! I'm so mad—I mean I'm so sorry," groaned Kirke, scrambling wildly up the cliff.

In all the city there was not a more unhappy boy than he. If murderers felt as he did, he was sure he pitied them.

Two men in a cart chanced to be passing along the grade. He got them to take Manuel home. He hunted up the straying burro, and rode to bring Dr. Bray. He held bandages while the fractured leg was being set. And after all this, when everything had been done for Manuel that could be done that day, Kirke ran home to his mother, and had a good cry. He wished he'd never seen Manuel, or the burro, or Silver Gate City. He

wished he had *never*, NEVER, NEVER been born. If it hadn't been for him Manuel wouldn't have fallen ; but now Manuel had broken his leg, and would be lame all his life, and perhaps he would die.

"O mamma! do you think Manuel will die?"

Mrs. Rowe pitied her little son from the bottom of her heart, and felt that, however wrong he had been, this was no time for chiding.

"No, dear; I do not believe Manuel will die because of his fall," she said soothingly. "He is young and healthy, and you tell me the doctor called the fracture a slight one?"

"Yes, mamma,"

"Papa and I must go to see Mrs. Carillo at once, and take her some money, and hire a nurse if one is needed."

"Do you suppose Manuel can ever carry newspapers again?"

"Oh, I hope so, Kirke! They would miss his small earnings sadly."

Kirke thought of the sewing-machine that Mrs. Carillo might now sigh for in vain, and gritted his teeth. Mr. Rowe was just entering with his overcoat on.

"Did Mrs. Carillo send word to the *Journal* office about Manuel's accident, Kirke?" he inquired, looking at his watch.

"No, papa; we didn't any of us remember."

"Then they won't have time to hire another boy in his place to-night. You'd better harness immediately, Kirke, and carry around Manuel's newspapers."

"But, papa, I'm so tired; couldn't" —

"I know you're tired, my son; but certainly you ought to be willing to do Manuel this little favor. It is no more than just."

Kirke arose rather reluctantly. "Oh, hum!" he cried, stretching his aching limbs, "I don't see why Manuel had to tumble.

Why couldn't he have held on by the tree? I could;" which may have been the truth, for Kirke was a much more nimble lad than Manuel. Kirke passed Weezy in the hall without noticing her swelled eyelids; and nobody had the heart to tell him that during the forenoon Zip had broken into Snowdrop's pen, and shaken him within an inch of his life.

"The dear boy feels this accident to Manuel keenly," said Mrs. Rowe to her husband, when Kirke was out of sight.

"Yes; and he ought to feel it," replied Mr. Rowe with earnestness. "Kirke is far too reckless. He must be taught to have more care for others."

"What should you think of requiring him to devote an hour a day to reading to Manuel?" asked Mrs. Rowe.

"I think well of it. And how would it do to have him carry Manuel's newspapers from this time on?"

"Kirke has never been obliged to do anything of that sort," said his tender-hearted mother; "wouldn't it be hard for him?"

"Not too hard; and unless the place is kept till Manuel is well again, Manuel may lose it."

On the road to Mrs. Carillo's, Mr. and Mrs. Rowe talked the matter over, and decided that Kirke could make amends to Manuel in no better way than by becoming his newspaper carrier. Kirke accepted the decision meekly. He honestly did wish to atone as far as possible for his late mischief; besides, he had found that delivering papers was not so bad, after all.

CHAPTER VI

KIRKE'S AMENDS

KIRKE had gone to bed with the most generous resolutions; but, as every boy knows, resolutions, like ripe peaches, will not always keep over night. He awoke tired and cross from his unusual exertions of the day before, and the moment he opened his eyes saw a half-dozen reasons for not delivering papers for Manuel.

First, he did not wish to spare the time. Were not the hours between the close of school and the six o'clock dinner the very hours when he and Paul and the rest of the team wanted to play shinny? Then, again, though he would have been ashamed to confess it, Kirke felt a little unwilling to put

himself in the place of a boy so poorly dressed as the Spanish lad.

"My father will pay the doctor, and mamma'll send nice things for Manuel to eat. Why should I bother my head about those old newspapers?" Kirke argued with himself as he ran down to breakfast. "I get precious little time out of school, anyway. Haven't I been helping take care of Donald till lately?"

But if Kirke had formed any idea of begging to be excused from his new duties, he gave it up the moment he entered the dining-room and heard his papa say, so affectionately, —

"Good-morning, my dear boy; I've just been telling your mamma that I'm proud of you."

"Proud of me, papa?"

"Yes, my son," returned his father, laying his thin, white hand fondly upon Kirke's

shoulder, "I'm proud of you ; not because you have been a naughty boy,"—Kirke winced, —"but because you are trying cheerfully to repair the wrong you have done. It's manly in a lad to be eager to make amends."

Kirke blushed to remember how he had just been grumbling to himself. He knew that such praise was more than he deserved at present, but he meant to earn it in the future.

"I'll go right up to ask how Manuel is this morning ; wouldn't you, papa?" he said, after they were seated at table.

"By all means, Kirke ; and if he is not able to talk, perhaps his mother can tell you what his task is."

"I know pretty well already, papa," replied Kirke, buttering the lower half of his gem-cake for Weezy, who considered this her due. She called it the "cribby side," because it had four square corners like her crib.

"And, O Kirke, please ask Mrs. Carillo for some *call-flower* for my Snowdrop," said she. "Poor Snowdrop can't eat. He only winks like this. That's every single thing he does."

"Yes, Weezy," answered Kirke; "I'll get the cauliflower if you'll give Zip and Ginger their breakfasts while I'm gone."

The boy stayed at Mrs. Carillo's only long enough to learn that Manuel had passed a restless night, and to make sure where to leave all the newspapers; then he brought home the cauliflower, and rushed to school.

After the close of the afternoon session he harnessed Hoppity into the cart, and drove to the *Journal* office for a pile of *Evening Journals*. With this beside him on the seat, and the reins between his knees, he started upon his rounds, rolling up the printed sheets, one by one, and tossing them out at the houses where they were due. The day before some

had hit wide of the mark, but to-day Kirke aimed more surely ; and by the end of the week he had become expert in throwing.

It did not help the matter in the least for Kirke, when he learned that Paul was strongly opposed to "peddling."

"Why don't you go round grinding scissors ? Or perhaps you could sell some second-hand oranges, you old Sell-Kirke," sneered Paul.

And Pauline wounded Molly deeply by remarking that Kirke's present employment was not "nice." She had always thought before that Kirke was "a little gentleman."

But when Molly repeated this to her mamma, Mrs. Rowe only smiled quietly, and said that it was very "nice" to do a kind act ; and that to herself and to his papa, Kirke had never seemed more like "a little gentleman" than since becoming a carrier.

Sometimes on his drives Kirke took with him Harry Hobbs, the little English boy.

Harry and his roly-poly sister, Essie, lived with their Aunt Ruth in the green board-and-paper cottage around the corner. They had lived there two years ; ever since Miss Ruth Hobbs "buried her silver in the ground." For, like many of her neighbors, Miss Ruth had spent all her money for land, which she had hoped to sell again at a higher price, but which she could not sell at any price whatsoever.

So now she was poor, and obliged to work hard to support herself and the orphans. She did fine washing for Mrs. Rowe ; and Harry often teased to go for this, in the hope of catching a drive with Kirke.

Not that Harry ever asked for the drive, — oh, no ! he was much too well-mannered. But he thought it no harm to hang about the stable while Kirke was harnessing, to be on hand in case Kirke should say, —

"Want an airing, little Britisher ? Well, hop in. Hoppity will take us."

One morning after Kirke had been carrying newspapers several weeks, — sometimes cheerfully, sometimes not, — he and Harry whisked out of the yard in the cart past Weezy on her new roller skates.

“Wish I had some of those thinks,” sighed Harry. He had his Aunt Ruth’s funny English habit of saying “thinks” for “things.”

“Maybe you’ll have some at Christmas.”

“No, I sha’n’t! I sha’n’t ’ave anythink. Santa Claus doesn’t come to Haunt Ruth’s ’ous, hever.”

“Oh, perhaps he’ll come this winter, Harry; you don’t know,” returned Kirke in a grandfatherly tone. When he talked with five-year-old Harry he felt quite aged, and very, very wise.

“No; Santa won’t come a-nigh us, ’ere. Haunt Ruth says so,” persisted Harry dolefully, as they turned aside for a ranch wagon filled with live turkeys. “I guess Santa

doesn't know the way. Back heast he came 'eaps of times. He slided down the chimney, and put thinks into our stockings."

"What did he look like, Harry?"

"Oh, I never saw him! Mamma never waked me. That was when mamma was 'ome. Now she's flied up to 'eaven."

"Yes, I know; it's too bad," replied Kirke, sorry for the motherless boy, but at a loss how to say so.

"Wish my mamma hadn't flied up to 'eaven. Wish she'd pull hoff 'er big wings, and drop down again!"

Kirke stopped the grieved little mouth with a shelled peanut.

"Maybe, though, mamma couldn't find us hout 'ere," pursued Harry, as soon as he could speak. "S'pose she could? Santa Claus can't."

"Santa Claus can't find you, hey, poor little kid?" muttered Kirke, hurling a news-

paper fiercely at the door they were passing. "Santa Claus had better find you all the same, if he's any kind of a gentleman."

A brilliant thought had seized Kirke, and nothing would do but he must share it speedily with Molly; so the moment he had got rid of his papers, he whipped up the burro and turned toward home. Hoppity happened to be unusually hungry, and dashed around the corner by Miss Hobbs's cottage at such a pace that he nearly ran over Harry's tow-headed sister.

"Why, Essie Hobbs! What are you doing here in the middle of the road?" exclaimed Kirke, drawing in the reins.

"I'se making *tookies*," said Essie sweetly.

She held an old tin gravy-strainer in her hand, and kept on sifting sand through it as unmoved as an hour-glass.

"My patience! you *are* a cool one," cried Kirke, himself all of a tremble. "I came within one of knocking you down."

"Haunt Ruth 'll switch you, Hessie, if you play in the street," said Harry, climbing from the cart.

"And serve you right, too, Essie," shouted Kirke, as he drove on.

He forgot that he had something special to say to Molly. The adventure had banished that from his mind even before he came upon her and Weezy by the rabbit's pen, where Weezy was sobbing with all her might.

"O Kirke! Snowdrop is dead; my dear, pretty, soft Snowdrop. Oh, I do feel so bad!"

"Is he dead?" said Kirke soberly. "I'm ever so sorry. But never mind, Weezy. We'll ask papa to buy you another rabbit."

"Oh! oh! oh! I don't want another rabbit; I want my onty donty Snowdrop."

"Don't, Weezy dear; don't cry so," said Molly, drying her own eyes. "Poor Snowdrop was so sick, you know. He never could have wanted to live with that red bite in his neck."

“Hor’ble old Zip! He bit my Snowdrop, and deaded him all up!” wailed Weezy, weeping harder than ever. “He ought to be deaded himself; disgustable thing!”

Kirke and Molly exchanged glances. When Weezy fell to crying like this, something must be done about it, or she would make herself ill.

“I tell you what, Weezy!” cried Kirke briskly; “we’ll give Snowdrop a grand, first-class funeral, and Zip sha’n’t be invited.”

“He’ll go,” sobbed Weezy; “I know he’ll go.”

“No, Weezy; we won’t let him go. We’ll lock him into the stable.”

Weezy’s sobs grew fainter. One wet red eye peeped over her wet white handkerchief.

“We’ll ask the grocer for a box,” said Molly, “and we’ll tack white cloth over it; won’t we Kirke? and make Snowdrop a lovely little casket.”

"And put roses and *chris-anthems* on?"

"Oh, yes! all the flowers that are going," said Kirke; "and I'll dig a grave down in the canyon, and line it with greens."

"No, no; not any greens. I won't have any greens," cried Weezy, her tears flowing again.

"Kirke doesn't mean spinach and dandelions; he means smilax and ferns," interposed Molly quickly. "And we'll have a procession, and you shall invite Snowdrop's friends."

"Oh, goody, goody! I'll ask Paul and Pauline, and Harry and Essie."

"And you shall be chief mourner, and wear crape," said Molly, delighted to see her little sister smiling.

The funeral occurred on the following morning. Snowdrop, with a cluster of blue and white forget-me-nots upon his breast, lay in state in his white casket in the rabbit-pen till the hour of burial, when Kirke and Paul lifted the casket into the back part of the burro-cart,

and heaped upon it the flowers collected since breakfast by Weezy.

“What’s in that paper bag in your hand, Weezy?” asked Molly, as the boys mounted the cart and set off at the head of the procession.

“Oh, something,” said Weezy mysteriously. She followed close behind the cart on her tricycle; next went Pauline and Molly on their bicycles; and last of all trudged Harry Hobbs, alone on foot. “Hessie couldn’t come,” he explained, “because she wasn’t big enough for a funeral.” Each child bore on the left arm a white rosette. Since Mary Queen of Scots wore white after the death of her young husband, Molly thought it highly proper that they should mourn in white for dear, innocent Snow-drop.

Ginger followed the train to the peppertree, mewing as plaintively as could have been desired; but out of respect to Weezy’s feelings

Zip was not allowed to appear. He had been confined in the stable to repent of his naughtiness, and, judging by his howls, was already very sorry.

As they moved slowly up the street, Paul whistled a funeral march, and Kirke beat time with his drum to add solemnity to the occasion.

"Manuel is peeping out of the window. I guess he thinks this is a pretty nice funeral," said Weezy in a gratified tone, as they left their wheels at the entrance of the canyon and walked in single file to the open grave.

Kirke carried the casket, and Paul helped him lower it into the hole with Weezy's skipping-rope.

"Wait a minute!" cried Weezy, as Kirke was about to shovel in the dirt. And she dropped into the grave the contents of the paper bag, — a few stalks of Snowdrop's cauliflower.

Then the boys filled in the earth, and

smoothed it into a shapely mound, which the girls strewed with flowers ; and everything having been done decently and in order, they all gave three groans for Snowdrop, and quietly came away.

But in passing out of the canyon, Weezy turned, waved her hand toward the rabbit's newly made bed, and cried softly, —

“Good-by, dear ! Good-by, my sweet, good, pretty little Snowdrop !”

CHAPTER VII

A PICNIC AT HOME

"SEE here, Molly! I want to tell you something," cried Kirke, stopping his sister under the star-tree on the lawn.

The procession had disbanded, and little Harry Hobbs, the last to tear himself away, was skipping down the cemented walks edged by rows of houseleeks, called by the children "old hens and chickens."

"I want to tell you something," repeated Kirke, as Harry's blue patched jacket faded from view. "I thought of it yesterday when Harry was jabbering about not having any Christmas presents. He's about dying for a pair of roller skates. Suppose you and I chip in and buy some?"

"How much do they cost?" asked Molly.

She was not a whit less generous than her brother; but having a better idea of the value of money, she made her Christmas allowance go farther than he did.

"Papa can tell; he bought Weezy's."

"If we give something to Harry, Kirke, we must give something to Essie."

"Oh, candy'll do for her! The little bunch won't know the difference."

"Well, we'll try to get the skates, anyhow; and if the money holds out, maybe we can find a tea-set for Essie when we take Weezy down-town."

This expedition down-town with Molly and Pauline was to be Weezy's birthday outing, in place of the trip to La Jolla, which had been postponed on account of Kirke's newspaper work. The girls were to show her the toy-shops and the curio stores, and complete the day's delights by a visit to a ladies'

restaurant and a treat of cake and ice-cream. Weezy looked forward to this entertainment with great pleasure, and talked about it many times during the week.

"Don't be too much disappointed, my dear, if it should rain to-morrow," her father said to her on Friday. "The rainy season is drawing near."

Mr. Rowe shivered as he spoke. Though he was gaining strength, he felt the least change in the weather keenly, and it seemed to him that a storm was brewing.

The next morning—the morning of Weezy's birthday—the sun kept out of sight, and the sky, once so blue, was mottled and blurred as if it had been rubbed by a soiled eraser. The only bright object about the house was yellow-coated Ginger, who darted restlessly from room to room like a quivering sunbeam. Even she knew that a tempest was coming.

"I just 'spise black days," grumbled Miss

Weezy, wandering into the dusky dining-room, where Molly sat by a window, floating sea-mosses in a soup-plate of water.

It was only the middle of the forenoon, and Weezy was sure that it ought to be tea-time.

"Papa says we must have rain to make the barley grow," said Molly, slipping a square of white cardboard under a spray of reddish moss.

"Don't like barley; don't want barley to grow," returned Weezy pettishly.

"Take care, little sister; don't joggle my elbow."

Molly was spreading the moss upon the card with a soft camel's-hair brush.

"What are you doing that for, Molly?"

"Oh, I'm making a Christmas card for Inez Dutton. Paul brought me the moss from La Jolla."

"Phew! It smells like fish."

Weezy flattened her disdainful little nose

against the window pane, outside which the mist was falling.

"Oh, dear! it's *missing*," said she. Then she uttered a cry of delight. "Come quick, quick, Molly! Here's the dearest little green hum-bird!"

"Where, oh, where?" exclaimed Molly, letting the card slip back into the plate.

"And he isn't standing on his bill in the air, either, a-whizzing his little wings. There he is on the big *heeltrope*. See him, Molly? He's roosting just like a biddy."

"Yes, yes; I see him now! Why, Weezy Rowe, I didn't know a humming-bird knew how to keep still."

"He'll blow off. Oh, I'm afraid he'll blow off!" whispered Weezy, catching her breath, as a gust of wind shook the heliotrope bush.

"Oh, no, he won't, Weezy! He's holding on to that branch with his toes."

"But what if he should let go, Molly?"

"He can't let go while his knees are bent that way," said Molly wisely. "Hens can't either."

"Can't? Who told you so?"

"Papa. When they sit down on their roosts they *have* to crook their toes. That's why they don't tumble off after they are asleep."

Weezy thought this very odd, but took care not to say so. She had a foolish dislike to letting Molly know how much she could teach her.

"That hum-bird has a red bib on," she remarked, to change the subject. "There, now! he's *flied* away. The boys have come and scared him."

"What *are* the boys making such a noise about?" asked Molly, taking up her brush.

The mist had changed to sleet. Hailstones were falling,—great rattling hailstones.

"It's an ice shower, Molly! Oh, it's an ice

shower!" shouted Weezy, dancing out upon the porch where Paul and Kirke were cheering and swinging their caps.

"Haven't had anything like this here before since I can remember!" cried Paul, pelting Kirke with a handful of the snowy crystals.

Everybody was excited. Mr. Rowe, wrapped in an afghan, came to the doorway. Mrs. Rowe followed, with Donald clinging to her skirts. Molly flew past them bearing a big wooden tray and the new dust-pan.

"O mamma! I've thought of something, — something splendid for Weezy, instead of the day down-town. I'll make some ice-cream; may I, and freeze it with hailstones?"

"How can you, Molly? We haven't any freezer, or any cream."

"Our cook buys cream of Mrs. Carillo," said Paul. "Now Manuel is laid up, Mrs. Carillo sells her cream to save the bother of making butter."

"I'll get it, mamma, if Paul will go with me," cried Kirke, who doted on ice-cream.

"Come ahead, Sellkirke ; I'll bring it half the way," said Paul.

"And I'm certain I can freeze it," added Molly, eager to display what she had learned in her cooking lessons at school.

"I've no objection to your trying, provided you don't trouble Hop Kee," returned her mother. "How would you like to have a birthday spread for Weezy in your own room?"

"And invite Paul and Pauline? That would be fine, mamma," said Molly.

"A picnic at home! Oh, oh! I'm going to have a picnic at home," shouted little Miss Weezy in high glee. And all the family rejoiced to see the child happy.

By this time the ground had become quite white. The boys collected the hailstones in as many bowls as they could lay their hands on, and then dashed off to the canyon.

While Mrs. Carillo went away to skim the cream, they remained with Manuel in the kitchen, which also served for dining-room and parlor. The sick lad was bolstered on the lounge, with his injured limb encased in what is called a plaster cast. He seemed rather proud of this cast, and made the boys feel how stiff and hard it was,—almost like marble.

“Looks as if you were turning into a statue, Manuel, beginning at that leg,” jested Paul.

“There isn’t much fun in it,” returned Manuel, slightly aggrieved.

Wasn’t it bad enough to have a broken leg, without having to be joked about it?

“Fun in it? No; I guess not, Manuel,” cried Kirke, wincing at the least allusion to Manuel’s mishap. “But aren’t you feeling better?”

“Better? Oh, yes; the dear Manuel has

no more the fever," said Mrs. Carillo, coming in with the pail of cream.

She had rejected Mrs. Rowe's offer to procure Manuel a nurse, preferring to take care of her boy herself; and Kirke observed that the "so-tired eyes" were red from watching. Oh, dear, dear, if the woman only had a sewing machine! Kirke wished he had money enough to buy her that one she wanted! How fine it would be to give it to her that very day!

After the cream had been carried home, and sweetened and flavored by Molly, Kirke packed the tin pail in a tub, and crowded about it layers of salt and of hailstones. Then, turn and turn about, he and Paul twirled the pail by the handle, removing the cover so often to peep within, that the wonder was that the cream ever froze. But it really couldn't help freezing where there were so many hailstones; and when it had

become stiff as a snowdrift, Molly put a blanket over it,—not to keep it warm, but to keep it cold.

“Now, Weezy, dear,” she said, “you and I must get our room ready for company.”

It was a dear little room, opening from their chamber, and also from the upper hall. It had a grate in one corner, and a bay window in the other; and near the ceiling, from the window to the chimney, were festooned ribbons of red, green, and orange, the State colors. These ribbons divided the room into two equal parts; and Weezy kept her things on the right side, and Molly kept hers on the left. It was their own little parlor, for themselves and their particular friends.

“You clear your table, and I’ll clear mine,” said Molly briskly, putting her work-basket and drawing-materials tidily away on the closet shelf.

Weezy skipped behind with her apron full of dolls and paint-boxes, which she dumped helter-skelter upon the closet floor.

"You're getting things dreadfully *mixy*," groaned Molly. "Please be slow."

Molly might as well have asked frisky Ginger to keep step to "Old Hundred." Her little sister fluttered about like thistledown in a breeze till the two tables were spread with embroidered tea-cloths and china, silver and glass. Then came a knock at the door, and Hop Kee appeared with eatables sent by the expected guests.

"It's like a church festival," said Molly, as she and Weezy arranged the things upon the tables.

Mr. Rowe furnished a basket of muscatel grapes; Mrs. Rowe a platter of "pocket-book" rolls; and there was a dish of lobster salad from Pauline, and some nuts and raisins from Paul. Kirke, who had returned chilled

from what he called his "paper drive, presented himself a few minutes later with a very red face and a very heaping tureen of hot popped corn. And behind Kirke came Hop Kee with a gift of radishes so daintily prepared that they looked like pink and white rosebuds.

But the crowning glory of the feast was Weezy's frosted birthday cake, with her name on the top in pink sugar letters, and around the name seven pink candles, one candle for every year of her life. Molly placed the cake upon Weezy's table, which was trimmed with smilax; and Weezy lighted the candles. The shades were drawn, the fire in the grate kindled; and when the company walked in the little parlor was ablaze with light. Outside, the hail had turned to rain, which dashed in little waterfalls against the windows.

"The street is swimming; papa brought me across in his arms," cried Pauline, giving Weezy seven kisses.

"Did he? Oh, he must stay to my party," exclaimed Weezy, dancing down the stairway, and dragging Captain Bradstreet back.

"Stay? of course I will; and thank you too," he was saying, in his bluff, hearty fashion. "I never refuse a lady."

After all were seated about the room, Molly served the salad upon green china plates, and Kirke handed these to the guests. Then he passed the buttered rolls and other nice things; and everybody ate and laughed and chatted, till presently it was time for Weezy to blow out the candles and cut the cake.

You should have seen how proud she looked when she lifted the big knife and began to slash into the loaf! If no two pieces were of the same size and shape, nobody was unkind enough to speak of it. The captain's happened to have the pink sugar W upon it, and Paul's had the two E's.

"I never ate cake with such *ease* before,"

remarked Paul roguishly, as Hop Kee carried around the ice-cream.

Weezy wondered why they laughed.

"I like the *cream* best," she said ; "it is *hail*-cream."

"It's hail to the cream, I say," cried Paul, spearing his fork into the frozen mound in his saucer.

"And hail to the little lady that invited us to share it with her," added the jovial captain.

"I never saw a little girl have a better time at her own party," said Kirke, giving Weezy's ear a playful tweak.

"And for my part, I never saw a little girl have a better party," returned Paul gallantly. "It beats La Jolla and the seine-fishing."

"But we're going to La Jolla too," cried Weezy, flourishing her big knife. "*Azackly* as soon as Manuel gets well, we're going ; 'thout a birthday."

CHAPTER VIII

IN A CHIMNEY

"I wish Manuel would hurry to get well," said Weezy impatiently, the afternoon before Christmas.

She wanted Kirke and Molly to finish the harness they were making for Zip, and objected to Kirke's leaving his work in order to carry Manuel's newspapers.

"I wish he'd get well, myself; you'd better believe that, Weezy," muttered Kirke, with a side glance at Molly on the upper step of the veranda.

Any remark about Manuel's illness gave Kirke a guilty feeling. Besides, he was heartily tired of what Paul termed "peddling." Should he ever be through with the

distasteful task? If he ever was, then hurrah for his new project! For the wish to buy Mrs. Carillo the sewing-machine had been maturing in Kirke's mind for many a day; and out of this had grown a plan thus far confided to no one but his papa and mamma. It was this: to drive a dime express, and set aside the proceeds for Mrs. Carillo.

That morning Mr. Rowe had given his consent; and remarked to Mrs. Rowe after his son was out of hearing, "That is a noble scheme for a lad no older than Kirke to propose. Some boys in his station in life would have too much false pride to make errand-boys of themselves."

"I think Kirke has gained independence since he began to carry the newspapers," answered Mrs. Rowe; "and he certainly has shown good feeling in regard to the Carillos. Aren't you gratified that he thought himself of buying the sewing-machine?"

"To be sure I am; we never must let the boy know that we had talked of buying it ourselves."

"By no means. Let him earn it if he can. It would be a pity to deprive him of the good and the pleasure that self-sacrifice brings."

"Manuel is improving fast," said Molly, waxing her thread as they sat on the veranda. "His bones are beginning to knit, the doctor says."

"Bones don't knit," exclaimed Weezy with scorn.

Molly smiled.

"Indeed they do, Weezy. They knit themselves. They grow together."

"Well," interrupted Kirke, pricking awl-holes very fast in the leather strap he was sewing; "as soon as Manuel can run upon his legs again, I know what I'm going to do."

"What are you, Kirke?"

"You'll see. Here, Zip, stand still, old doggie, and let us try on your suit."

Zip barked and wriggled ; but between them, Kirke and Molly slipped the harness over him, taking it in here and loosening it there, till Molly pronounced it "a love of a fit."

"Well, Kirke, what are you going to do?" repeated Molly, while she set the final stitches.

"Oh, something fine." Kirke screwed up his lips to keep back the weighty secret.

"I know, Kirke. You're going to La Jolla with 'The Merry Five' to see the seine-fishing."

"Something more'n that, Molly."

"With Paul, then, to his uncle's ranch at Sweetwater."

"No ; guess again."

"Can't, Kirke ; tell me."

"Well, sir," said Kirke, flourishing his awl, "please listen. When I wind up my newspaper job I mean to start in business."

"In whose business?" asked Molly, laugh-

ing. She had often heard her brother talk like this before.

"In my own business, thank you. In the express business."

"Kirke Rowe! what *are* you raving about? Have you spoken to papa?"

"Of course. He says I may do it out of school-hours."

"May do what? Who says it?" interrupted Weezy, who had been to the *olla* swinging from the north porch to get herself a drink of water.

"*May eat my dinner; EVERYBODY says it!*" retorted Kirke, with a teasing laugh. And he darted away on his afternoon trip.

On his return, he brought with him a little tin can of black paint and a small paint-brush. His sharp-eyed little sister saw him put these away on a beam in the stable, and was not slow in asking what he meant to do with them.

"Wait till Manuel is well, and I'll show you."

"But I want to know now," pouted Weezy.

"Do you, really? Yes; I believe you do!"

"Oh, Kirke, I think you might tell me."

Being much too fond of hectoring his prying young sister, Kirke next began to whistle. But seeing Weezy's lips quiver, he stopped at once, and hastened to interest her in two parcels lying on the seat of the cart.

"Here are the roller skates for Harry Hobbs, Missy. Aren't they beauties?"

"They're *exquit*. Oh, won't Harry be so glad!" cried Weezy, hopping on one foot.

"Glad? The little fellow will chuckle way down to his toes!"

"What's in the *swelly* white paper?"

"Oh, that's a rubber ball for Essie. There was money enough for that too."

"Was there? And did *I* buy some of it?"

"Yes; you bought all the hole and part of the wind," answered Kirke in jest. "I put your twenty-five cents into the purse with Molly's money and mine."

Weezy's eyes sparkled like stars. Ever since the morning when she had overheard Kirke and Molly talking of presents for the little Hobbs children, she had been eager to join in the purchase. She supposed her quarter of a dollar could buy almost anything; for she knew about as much of the worth of money as her horned toads knew of arithmetic.

"Where's Molly?" asked Kirke, feeding an armful of barley straw to Hoppity.

"She's gone to Mrs. Carillo's; Pauline too. Mamma sent a Christmas-cake; frosting on."

"Then they won't be home much before dinner. You and I had better take the things over to Miss Hobbs right away," said Kirke, tucking the skates under his arm.

"Run into the house, please, Weezy, and ask mamma if we can."

Weezy returned with her hat on, and a brown paper parcel in her hand.

"Mamma says 'yes'; and for us to give this to Miss Hobbs, and tell her 'Merry Christmas.'"

"Oh, yes; I remember. It's spider-leg tea."

"'Tisn't spiders' legs," contradicted Weezy indignantly.

"I didn't say it was spiders' legs," retorted Kirke, grinning. "It's a nice kind of tea that Miss Hobbs likes. She drinks tea like a fish."

"You're a funny boy. Fishes don't drink tea," chattered Weezy, skipping along the pavement beside her brother, swinging the parcel by the string.

"There, Miss Hobbs can't be a fish. See here, Weezy; don't say a word to Harry and Essie about the presents. I'll give 'em to their Aunt Ruth on the sly, and ask her to put them into the stockings to-night."

But unfortunately Kirke and Weezy found the small green cottage closed, and not a living creature in sight save Miss Hobbs's nanny-goat browsing by the roadside.

"I call this up-and-down shabby," said Kirke, weary of knocking. "Let's go round to the back door."

That also was fastened. Kirke perched upon a ladder standing in front of it, thrust his hands in his pockets, and after his usual habit began to whistle.

"Going to wait till Miss Hobbs comes home?" queried Weezy, walking backward to see the top of the ladder which rested against the house below the eaves.

"Depends upon when she comes. Who knows but she's gone to Mexico?"

"Leave the things on the *prazza*, Kirke. *I* would. It'll s'prise her."

Kirke shook his head, and stopped whistling.

"No, Weezy ; that never'd do. Somebody might steal 'em, or the goat might chew the tea and have a fit. No ; I suppose we shall have to bring the presents to-morrow."

"Oh, dear, and not have Harry and Essie find a single, dingle one when they wake up? I think that'll be horrid."

"So do I ; but who wants to come back after dinner?" said Kirke rather crossly. "We're going to light the Christmas-tree early, before Donald goes to bed. I'd chuck the bundles in at a window, only Miss Hobbs has bolted every blessed one," continued Kirke, dropping the vexatious parcels at the foot of the ladder, and climbing up to look down the street for the children and their aunt.

Before he knew it, Weezy had followed, still dangling by its string the pound of spider-leg tea.

"Oh, what a weeny, teeny house it is," she cried, capering behind Kirke over the flat roof.

"S'pose Santa Claus could crawl down that teenty tonty chimney?"

"'Twould be a pretty tight squeeze for the old gentleman, wouldn't it?" cried Kirke, peeping in at the top.

"What did you come up here for, Midget? A fine time I shall have helping you down."

"Don't want you to help me. I can climb down my own self," replied Weezy coolly, standing on the toe of his right boot in order to peep into the "smoke-hole." "O Kirke! let's make Miss Hobbs laugh herself to pieces, will you? Let's throw the presents down her chimney!"

"Make believe be Santa Claus, hey?" laughed Kirke. "You're a bright chicken."

Weezy was always as quick as a flash. She did not stop now to think whether Kirke were in jest or in earnest; but before the words were fairly out of his mouth she gave the paper of tea a fling, and over it went into the chim-

ney. Instead of falling to the bottom, it caught by the string on a sharp point of mortar just out of reach ; and there it hung, swaying backward and forward like a clumsy pendulum.

“Luddy tuddy, you’ve done it now, Miss Meddlesome,” exclaimed Kirke sorely vexed. “What’ll Miss Hobbs say to you?”

“I meant to throw it way, way down. Truly I did,” cried Weezy in dismay. “Oh ! can’t you get it, Kirke ? Try. Oh, please try !”

“‘Oh, please try !’ mimicked Kirke angrily. “Oh, yes, ‘please try,’ and make myself as black as a crow !”

Tearing off his jacket, he leaned forward into the sooty square of bricks as far as he safely could. Not succeeding in touching the package, he leaned a little farther, and a little farther yet. He kept reaching and reaching till at last his fingers closed over the parcel. He had the parcel. Oh, yes ; but the chimney

had *him*; and it held him fast, like a stopper in a bottle! All but his legs,—they were free, and appeared above the upper row of bricks, waving violently to and fro, as if a tempest blew them. You might have fancied they were the stalks of some strange plant, and that the chimney was the flower-pot.

“Oh, I’m stuck, Weezy! I can’t move. Oh, what shall I do?” shrieked the unfortunate boy in a far-away voice.

“Oh, oh! what shall I do?” echoed Weezy, hopping up and down, and crying with all her might.

“I’m choking. I can’t breathe.”

“Kirke’s choking. He can’t breathe,” yelled Weezy to the four corners of the house.

“Louder! Scream louder!”

“Oh, come! Somebody come! Kirke’s *smuddering*!”

“Howl! Call papa!”



"O, I'm stuck, Weezy! I can't move."

"I'll howl! oh, I will!" sobbed Weezy, flying to the ladder so easily climbed.

Its uppermost round was some inches below the roof. Would she be able to step upon it with no one holding her hand? She had boasted that she could climb down "her own self." Could she? Did she dare?

"Oh, the ladder'll jiggle! I 'most know it'll jiggle!" wailed she, dropping upon her knees with her back to it, and clinging to the eaves with both hands.

She put out one little foot, then drew it back. Oh, the step was so long, and she was so short; and the ladder was so very, very joggly!

But she heard Kirke murmuring in the chimney like a big fly in a jug, and saw his legs kicking harder than ever.

"I'll call papa, Kirke. Oh, I will!" cried she, so frightened for her brother that she forgot to be afraid for herself.

She put out her foot again; and this time she did not draw it back, but kept on nimbly down the ladder. Nevertheless, for all the good she did Kirke by going, she might as well have remained upon the roof; for Miss Hobbs ran puffing into the yard that very minute, pointing to Kirke's dancing legs, and crying, —

“Hof hall thinks!”

You may be sure the good woman was not long in throwing down her clothes-basket, mounting the roof, and pulling Kirke out of the chimney by his two feet, as if he had been a forked radish growing upside down. Ah, such a sight as he was! No ink could have been blacker than his face. At the sight of it Miss Hobbs sank upon the shingles and laughed and laughed; and Weezy and the other children laughed till they cried. Kirke thought them very silly, but put on a bold front, and said that so long as he was

free he didn't care much whether he was a white man or a negro.

At the foot of the ladder he slipped the skates and ball into Miss Hobbs's apron, and gave her the tea, which was not in the least harmed, and which pleased her extremely.

"Hand when 'Arry and Hessie see your presents to-morrow morning they'll be too 'appy to live," she said, wiping her eyes on the hem of the apron. "You are grand, good children, hall of you. Bless your little 'arts."

Miss Hobbs's blessing sent Kirke home as soothed as he was sooty; and while he scrubbed off the grime, he kept smiling at the remembrance that he had helped to make somebody "'appy."

"I'll try it again," he muttered between dashes of soapsuds. "I'll try next to make Mrs. Carillo 'appy; but, Timothy Moses! if I know myself, I'll steer clear of her chimney!"

IX

BY THE SEA

THE Rowe children enjoyed the Christmas-tree immensely ; and their presents, which were just the ones that they had most desired. They had a happy Christmas also ; though with doors and windows open, and flowers blooming everywhere, Molly said it seemed too much like the Fourth of July. Then New Year's came and passed ; and the Chinese New Year's, which attracted Hop Kee to Chinatown night after night to feast with friends, and to burn yards and yards of India crackers. And now it was March, with green fields and glowing yellow poppies.

By this time Manuel was able to carry his newspapers himself, and "The Merry Five"

celebrated Kirke's freedom by taking the long-talked-of trip to La Jolla. As an especial favor Weezy had been allowed to bring Zip, at present in her good graces.

The party intended to dine at the hotel, kept by a landlord known to Mr. Rowe; and on arriving, Kirke and Paul went at once to the office to register their names, while the girls remained outside upon the veranda. Several nicely dressed people were seated there admiring the beautiful view of the ocean, and the children talked in low tones in order not to disturb them.

"Oh, isn't it lovely here?" exclaimed Pauline, pushing back her hair, which was apt to be untidy.

"So peaceful and quiet," said Molly.

"Bow-wow-wow! bow-wow-wow!" yelped wicked Zip at the top of his voice. He had spied a little white kitten under a bench, and he barked at her till the poor kitten rounded her back into an arch.

"Here, Zip; come here," called Weezy, deeply mortified.

But Zip was making the most of this opportunity to tell a cat how he hated her, and he would not be diverted; though Weezy coaxed and Molly scolded, he continued to bark till Kirke rushed out and dragged him away by the collar.

"Come on, all of you," called Kirke, looking backward.

"I never *was* so ashamed," cried Molly, very red in the face, as she and the others followed down to the shore. "Ginger won't allow such actions."

"No; Ginger is too spunky. Zip was bound to give this little kitten a piece of his mind," remarked Kirke dryly.

"Yes," retorted Paul; "he was very *dogmatic*."

"And very *unfeline*," added Molly amid a chorus of laughter.

"What is unfeline, Molly?" asked Weezy, rather aggrieved.

"*Uncatly*," replied Molly gayly, which called forth a second shout of laughter.

"Hoh, 'uncatly' is a make-believe word. Don't I know, Molly Rowe?"

It was one of Weezy's trials that people would talk of things she could not understand; and one of her failings that she wished to appear to know more than she knew.

"Zip is like a cinnamon-tree, — chiefly valuable for the bark," observed Paul; and was immediately chided by Pauline for his rudeness.

"Well, I'm not sorry to give Zip's bark to the waves," said Molly, as they reached Gold Fish Point, and looked down upon the great caverns.

A flock of wild ducks was alighting upon the rocky wall above them, and Molly compared these to big letters on a blackboard.

"Only your ducks happen to be black, and your blackboard happens to be brown," said Kirke. "The ducks look to me more like splotches of paint on the side of an old barn."

"Oh, Kirke," broke in Weezy, sitting beside him on the bench placed for tourists, "what did you buy your paint for? You promised you'd tell me."

"I promised I'd tell you sometime."

"Well, it's sometime now."

Kirke chuckled, and aimed an orange-peel at a sea-gull skimming over their heads.

"If you must know, I'm going to paint my name on my burro-cart."

"What for?"

"For a sign."

"Sign of what?"

"Sign I've gone into business."

Weezy began to scowl. Molly and Paul and Pauline tried to appear indifferent. They

would not humor Kirke by betraying any curiosity.

"I may as well tell, I suppose," said Kirke, after a decent pause. He was really eager to reveal the important secret kept all these weeks from pure love of teasing. "The fact is, I'm going to run an express."

"An express?" repeated Weezy, secretly wondering if her wide-awake brother could mean to run off with a steam-engine.

"Yes; I expect to 'start in' a week from next Monday."

Paul looked at Kirke in surprise.

"Well, Selkirk, you're about the queerest fellow I ever saw, or ever didn't see! I thought you had had enough of that sort of thing when you went round peddling papers!"

There was a slight touch of contempt in Paul's tone. He had forgiven Kirke the newspaper craze because Kirke held queer notions about doing his duty, and all that sort of

thing. But what upon earth had set him out to run an express? Paul began to suspect that Kirke was not as refined as he ought to be.

"Well, I want a little fun ; don't you understand?" was all the reply Kirke made.

He did not like to say that the prime motive for his new enterprise was the desire to help Mrs. Carillo, for Paul would laugh at that. Moreover, Kirke never boasted of his good impulses ; whatever Paul and Pauline might think, Kirke was at heart "a little gentleman."

"Might as well be a common truckman while you're about it, Kirke," growled Paul.

"Why will you do such odd things, Kirke?" murmured blushing Molly. "What will people say?"

Kirke whistled to keep up his courage, then remarked for the second time,—

"I shall 'start in' a week from Monday. Must letter my cart first."

"What shall you put on?" asked Paul coldly, beginning to climb down the cliff.

"What would you, Paul?"

"I? *I* shouldn't put on anything. But if you're bound to make a spread, how's this? 'Parcels delivered to any part of the city.'"

"'For ten cents,'" added Kirke, with a business-like air. "I must get that in, you know, to catch trade."

"Why, Kirke Rowe, you can't put all those letters on one little cart," cried Molly, as Kirke hastened after Paul, now entering the largest cave.

"Please bring me a mermaid's cradle," called Weezy, when Kirke had reached the water's edge.

"I will if I can find one," screamed Kirke, skipping upon a large rock extending far into the ocean.

He became so engrossed in looking for the little shell that he never noticed a big wave

coming, till the wave broke over him and drenched him from head to foot.

“Oh, he’s *drownded!* my brother Kirke is *drownded!*” shrieked Weezy from the top of the cliff.

But the next moment Kirke clambered up the steep side with a wry face.

“‘Drownded’? no; I’m not ‘drownded,’ but I’m in a pickle, — an outrageous pickle. How shall I ever go in to dinner?”

“O Kirke Rowe! you unlucky boy! First it’s chimneys and then it’s oceans! What’ll happen to you next?” exclaimed Molly. “Oh, I’m afraid you’ll get a dreadful cold.”

“Strip off your jacket, Kirke,” ordered Paul, hurrying to the rescue.

Paul wrung out the dripping jacket and spread it in the sun; Pauline squeezed the salt water from Kirke’s hair; and Molly soiled all the pocket handkerchiefs of the party in trying to rub his clothes dry. As for Weezy,

she tired herself very much in whirling about and doing nothing.

"I wonder you didn't see the tide coming in, Kirke," said Pauline, parting his hair with a sharp bit of clamshell.

"Poh! what do you girls know about the sea?" scoffed Kirke, forgetting that Pauline had made several voyages.

"There's one thing that we girls do know about, anyway," returned Pauline good-naturedly; "it's about dinner-time. The people are walking toward the hotel; and if you can squeeze into your jacket we'd better hurry."

"The Merry Five" had a little square table to themselves by a window facing the ocean, and began their dinner with clam-soup—all but Paul. He protested that he was not *clamorous* for that sort of thing.

"Does pretty *Paul* want a cracker?" asked Molly, slyly passing the plate.

"No, thank you," retorted Paul; "I'll wait for the fish. I like fish, *Rowe* and all."

It was a merry meal; and when it was ended, the landlord drove the party to the beach a mile away, to see the seine-fishing.

"One of the Kanakas is pulling the boat around Gold Fish Point," said Paul, as they jolted along in the barge with others from the hotel. "Those Kanakas can row like smoke."

"Those — what?" asked Weezy, opening her eyes very wide.

"Kanakas, — Sandwich Islanders, you know. There are two of them at La Jolla, and they catch all the fish for the hotel table. They are capital seine-fishers."

"I'm glad they're *sane*; I'm afraid of crazy men," said Molly demurely, as the barge stopped at the beach.

The Kanakas had reached it before them; and the long net, or seine, was piled in the

stern of the dory, all but the end held by three men on the shore.

“Look, look! the fellow is pushing out to sea!” cried Kirke in great excitement.

The brown-skinned islander sat in the bow propelling the dory with the oars, while the net trailed in its wake like a great serpent. He was steering straight through the breakers which came thundering upon the beach.

“Oh, oh, the boat is standing on end! It’ll spill the man out!” shrieked Weezy.

But before she had finished speaking, the boat shot from the waves right side up, with the Kanaka still rowing. Then it seemed to stand upon its other end, and then to disappear beneath the rollers; yet, when the rollers passed, the dory was still afloat, and the Kanaka was still rowing.

“I don’t believe he’s missed a stroke,” cried Kirke; “is he turning back, Paul?”

“Yes; he’s making for the beach, where

those two men are waiting to drag in the end of the net that's in the boat. Let's run down and count the catch."

The net was drawn up in a great scallop upon the sand, and found to contain a few small silver fish, and three scarlet rock-cod. When these had been put into a tub, the Kanaka rowed out again with the empty seine, and the second time brought it back heavy with scaly creatures, the largest of which was a shark. Zip barked at this so wildly that Kirke hurried him into the wagon.

"Zip needn't be so furious; the landlord says this shark isn't a man-eater," observed Molly, as they entered the car on their return home.

"Zip is only giving another piece of his mind," returned Paul with a shrug.

"He speaks too many pieces," retorted Pauline flippantly.

"Recites too much doggerel," put in Molly.

At the Silver Gate Station "The Merry Five" took an electric car; and on the way home passed Manuel with his leather bag slung across his shoulder.

"Do you think he limps at all, Molly?" whispered Kirke, returning Manuel's smile and bow.

"Why, no," said Molly, casting a sharp glance through the window. "I'm sure he doesn't. He walks as well as ever he did."

CHAPTER X

THE BURRO EXPRESS

It was the triggest, quaintest turnout in Silver Gate City, — that little gray burro with his little gray cart and little gray driver, or, more correctly speaking, little driver in gray. Molly said so ; and Molly ought to have known, having been consulted times without number in regard to all the details, from the cardinal bow on the whip to the black signs on the cart itself.

Of the latter there were two, one on either side, printed in bold capitals, that he who ran might read :—

KIRKE ROWE.

PARCELS.

"You've painted the letters beautifully, Kirke; and they are not so very uneven, I'm sure," said Molly.

Kirke was setting forth on his trial trip, and had stopped his team in front of the veranda to be admired by his sisters.

"I wanted to print 'Parcels carried to any part of the city for ten cents,' but there wasn't room," remarked Kirke regretfully.

"I should think not, unless you had made the cart bigger," rejoined Molly. "You might have painted 'Parcels carried for ten cents,' though, and have left off your name."

"Indeed, that would be fine, to go into business and not get any credit for it!"

"Why didn't you paint it 'Kirke Rowe, ten cents?'" asked Weezy. "*I* would."

"And have them call me a 'ten-cent boy!' No, thank you, Miss Louise; I flatter myself that I'd sell for rather more than a dime."

"I hope you'll earn ten dimes this very

first night," said Molly, leaning over the veranda railing. "Why, Kirke Rowe, if you haven't been painting Hoppity's hoofs!"

"Only polishing them with shoe-blackening. Don't they look neat? By, by;" and off drove Kirke, whistling "Tommy Atkins" as loud as he could.

He was full of courage this afternoon, and secretly hoped to come home with his pockets jingling with silver. If he did, so much the better for Mrs. Carillo and her sewing-machine! Since Manuel's accident, Kirke had seen Mrs. Carillo nearly every day, and come to like her extremely. Perhaps he liked her the better because she was so handsome; certainly he liked her none the less because she was so fond of himself, so "chummy," so confiding. He knew to a dime how many silver pieces were in the cracked blue bowl under the chopping-tray; knew, too, that since Manuel's illness these

had not increased. He had actually seen the coveted sewing-machine which had been offered to Mrs. Carillo for twenty-five dollars.

"So *sheap*," she said. "Almost so good as the new; and with the so many 'tachments."

From her lips, "'tachments" had a very affectionate sound, Kirke thought. On his way down-town, he felt in his pocket for the business cards printed for him by Paul, on Paul's hand-press. They were safe. He read one with inward satisfaction:—

KIRKE ROWE,

Express Carrier,

1760 LEMON STREET.

People smiled when they saw Kirke coming down Main Street; he looked so eager and wide awake; and his cart and burro looked so spick-and-span, like those painted on slices of orange wood in the curio stores. But these people who had time to smile, had

no packages to be carried. Kirke walked Hoppity up and down several streets without securing an order.

“This never’ll do; I must make some kind of a bluster to draw custom,” he said to himself; and at the next corner he shouted lustily, “One dime, one dime; parcels to any part of the city for one dime.”

A fat old lady on the crossing heard him, and called out,—

“Here, sonny, come here; I have a budget for you, sonny!”

Sonny, indeed! What was the woman thinking about to talk that way to an expressman? Kirke had a great mind not to pay any attention to her, but could not afford to miss his first chance of earning a dime. In doing the errand he passed Miss Hobbs’s green cottage, and little Essie playing in the street with her Christmas ball; and a little farther on he met Molly and Pauline.

"I'm ten cents in, Molly," he shouted. "If I earn more money than I can take care of, I'll give you some."

"Thank you, sir; you're very kind," answered Molly, sweeping him a courtesy.

"Kirke thinks it'll be great fun to drive that little cart," she said to Pauline as he turned the corner; "but I'm afraid he'll soon get sick of it."

"Have you ever found out what started him to do it, Molly?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I made him own up at last. He wants to help Mrs. Carillo buy a sewing-machine."

"Why, what put that notion in the boy's head?" asked Pauline, walking on with one arm around Molly's waist.

"Oh, she needs it dreadfully! She has had to give up doing fine embroidery because it hurts her eyes."

"But that isn't Kirke's bread and butter."

"Papa and mamma think it is. Mrs. Carillo would have paid for the machine by this time if it hadn't been for Manuel's accident. And you know Kirke was to blame for that."

"Oh, accidents will happen," said easy-going Pauline, stooping to tie her shoe-lacing.

"Kirke doesn't talk much about the affair; but he knows he did wrong, and wants to try to make up for it."

"It's kingdom-of-heaven good of him."

Molly smiled.

"Kirke's pretty good once in a while," said she; "but I don't see anything very heavenly about him."

"Well, anyway, I don't believe many boys would have cared so much for Manuel's falling as Kirke does."

"I don't know why they shouldn't, Pauline. I feel awfully about it myself, and I'm sure papa and mamma do."

If Mr. and Mrs. Rowe were so distressed

in regard to the matter, why didn't they buy the machine themselves? Pauline wondered. She did not suspect that they were encouraging Kirke in his scheme for the lad's own sake.

"But Kirke didn't push Manuel over the cliff, Molly," she said.

"Oh, no, Pauline; of course not. Kirke would never be mean like that. But Manuel wouldn't have tumbled if Kirke hadn't stumped him to stand on the burro. Don't you see?"

"I see how your eyes shine! And they're just the color of violets," cried Pauline admiringly. "I like to stir you up, Molly. It makes you look as pretty as a pink."

XI

KIRKE WRETCHED

WEEKS went by, bringing Kirke success in his new enterprise. As he said, he soon "got the hang of the thing," and learned where to secure the best chances for business. Some days he earned a dime, some days, alas, nothing.

But on the dull days, when he began to show signs of discouragement, his father was pretty sure to hire him to do some errands for himself.

The whole family was interested in Kirke's success; and there was a general rejoicing on one memorable Saturday, when during an auction sale he amassed the lordly sum of one dollar and twenty cents.

Every night he put the day's earnings into a round Mexican purse given him by Weezy; and every morning he emptied the purse into Molly's lap, and they counted the silver over just for fun.

By the first of June the pile had increased to a goodly size; by the middle, it was so large that, as Kirke proudly observed, —

“It wouldn't jingle in the purse worth a cent.”

That day he divided the quarters, dimes, and nickels into separate heaps, and added them aloud in triumph. In all they amounted to nineteen dollars and ninety cents.

Kirke was not taken by surprise; though he clapped his hands all the same, and gave three cheers for Mrs. Carillo and the sewing-machine.

“A dime more, Molly, and I'll have the twenty dollars.”

“If you don't earn it this morning, I'll

give it to you," said Molly, nearly as delighted as he was.

"And if I do earn it, will you treat?"

"Yes, I'll treat; what'll you have?"

"Peanuts, thank you; they go farthest for the money," cried Kirke cheerily, leaping into his cart. "Say, Hoppity, old boy, we've twenty dollars—all but—to add to Mrs. Carrillo's five."

The burro looked backward and bobbed his head as if he understood the remark. "Hurry up, old Lazy-bones; if we're sharp we can make that dime before school."

And as he drove down Fifth Street, Kirke's glad young voice rang out clear and loud:—

"One bit! one bit! Parcels to any part of the city for one bit!"

Keeping his eyes wide open, he presently saw a possible job in the shape of a large, ungainly bundle borne by two young girls.

"Can I take that for you, young ladies?"



"It's my graduating-dress. Don't crush it."

he asked, driving up to the pavement where they stood earnestly talking. "I deliver parcels anywhere within city limits for a dime."

The girls looked at Kirke, who had lifted his cap; and the one in red said to the one in brown, —

"Would you have him take it, Josie?"

And the one in brown answered,

"Yes, Mary, I would. 'Twas shabby of your dressmaker not to send it."

"Oh, she hadn't time, you know, Josie. The telegram came while she was trying on my dress, and she had to rush for the train."

Then handing the package to Kirke, who was getting a little impatient, the young lady added, —

"It's my graduating-dress. Don't crush it; will you?"

"Of course not," he replied rather curtly. "Where shall I leave it?"

“Wait ; I’ll give you the street and number in black and white, so there can be no mistake,” said she, opening her school-satchel, and pulling over its contents. “There, this is my name and address.”

And she drew out her visiting-card, and handed it to him with a lofty air.

Not to be outdone in ceremony, Kirke promptly handed her in exchange a card of his own, — one of the business cards printed for him by Paul.

“Do hurry, Mary ; we shall be late to rehearsal,” cried Josie, walking on.

“Yes, yes ; I’m coming, Josie,” responded the girl in red, throwing Kirke his dime, and hurrying away.

He had hardly placed the parcel in the back of the cart before she and her schoolmate had vanished around the corner.

“Goodness me ! aren’t girls queer ?” he said to himself. “They’ll keep a fellow waiting

half an hour, and at the end of it go off like a gun."

Then he glanced at the card in his hand:—

Miss Mary Davis,

1650 Plum Street.

"Phew! Doesn't Miss Mary Davis put on the style, though! Greeted me as if I was about four years old. Didn't want me to crush her package! Wonder if she supposed I'd sit down on it. Well, who cares? I've got the job, anyway, and I'll show Miss Mary Davis I can do it in shape."

When he drove into his own door-yard twenty minutes later Molly was starting for school.

"Hoopty-do! I'm ten cents in! I've made up the twenty dollars," he cried, leaping over the wheel in a tremor of delight.

"That's splendid, Kirke. And I've found out about Mrs. Carillo's birthday; it's next Thursday; Manuel told me so."

"I'd rather give her the money to-morrow, and have it over with," said Kirke, slipping Hoppity out of the thills.

"O Kirke! that wouldn't be half so nice. I" —

Her brother was rods away, staking the burro in the alfalfa patch. Then he skipped off to school, and Molly saw him no more that day; for by permission he took luncheon at noon with Paul Bradstreet, and after school went with Paul up to the *mesa* for a game of ball, and played till dark.

But when he came home flourishing his shinny-stick, Molly met him on the veranda with most unwelcome news.

"O Kirke! there has been a girl here to inquire for you, — a girl with a red dress on."

"Mary Davis?"

"She didn't tell her name. She came twice. She's dreadfully stirred up; says she gave you her graduating-dress to carry home, and hasn't seen it since!"

"Why, Molly Rowe, is she crazy? I carried it straight to her house."

"She says you didn't; she says it isn't there."

"But it is; it must be. I handed it to a young lady that came to the door."

"This girl says her sister has been at home all day, and the door-bell hasn't rung once."

"Then the girl fibs; and I'll tell her so to her face," cried Kirke, wringing the door-knob to relieve his feelings.

"Come in here, and let us talk about it," called his mamma quietly from the sitting-room; and he went in, tired, hungry, angry, and thoroughly bewildered. Still, if anybody could unravel this mystery he was sure his mother could do it; Kirke was a boy who believed in his mother.

"The girl thinks you dropped it in the street," continued Molly, following him. "And she's so troubled about it. I'm just as sorry

for her as I can be. She has the class valedictory; and she says she hasn't any other dress fit to be seen."

Between pity for the girl's distress and mortification at her brother's having caused it, Molly was almost crying.

"I didn't drop it. If I'd lost the parcel does she suppose I'd be mean enough not to own up?" cried Kirke, his eyes flashing. "Now, mamma, you know I wouldn't be such a sneak?"

"I think you would mean to be a manly boy, Kirke," said she, stroking the hair back from his hot forehead.

She believed in her son, as he believed in his mother, but in despite of this could not help being a good deal disturbed by the present occurrence.

"Does papa blame me?"

"Papa has gone to Lakeside."

"But *you* blame me, mamma; I can see it

just as plain!" said Kirke, in an injured tone.

"You're sometimes heedless, my son. You may have taken the dress to the wrong place" —

"But, mamma, the young lady at the Plum-street house said 'twas all right."

"What young lady?"

"The one that opened the door for me."

"What did you say to her?"

"I handed her the girl's card, and told her the girl had sent that bundle; and she said, 'Very well, you may leave it.'"

"And you gave it to her?"

"Straight into her arms, mamma; and she tore a hole in the paper and peeped inside."

"Did you see the gown, Kirke? What color was it?" demanded Molly inquisitively.

"Orange, I believe—or pink; something like that. Oh, I don't remember. But I know I gave it to the young lady."

"It s strange, very strange," mused Mrs. Rowe. "And there's that young girl crying her eyes out for the want of it. You must call at her house this evening, and learn what the trouble is, Kirke. I promised to send you as soon as you'd eaten your dinner."

"I believe that Plum-street woman is an idiot. She can't tell a dress from a paper bag," muttered he, stalking into the dining-room where Hop Kee was clearing the table.

"Don't you want me to go with you?" asked kind-hearted Molly, pouring her brother a glass of milk, while the Chinaman brought the platter of broiled quail from the warming-oven. "I'll go if you like."

This was Molly's way of showing sympathy.

"Good! You're a brick, Molly!"

This was Kirke's way of expressing gratitude.

When they went out upon the street, the electric lights were already twinkling. Hardly speaking, they hurried on until they reached

Plum Street. At the second block Kirke paused.

"This is the house," said he; "but it's dark as a pocket."

"I suppose all the shades are down," said Molly, walking up to the front door and ringing the door-bell.

Nobody answered. Kirke took his turn in pressing the electric button, and sounded a peal that wakened the echoes.

"Mercy, Kirke! they'll think we're policemen!"

Still nobody came.

Then Kirke went around to the back door, as he had gone to Miss Hobbs's the day before Christmas; and he knocked and knocked till his knuckles ached, and all the dogs in town fell to barking.

"Not a soul here! Are you sure this is where you came this morning, Kirke?"

"Sure."

"Oh, dear, then they've gone off somewhere to spend the evening. I suppose that poor girl was so unhappy that she couldn't stay at home."

"Poor girl! You're always mourning over that poor girl, Molly Rowe; I should think you might pity your own brother a little bit! I'll bet you I'm as unhappy as she is; now come! And I haven't done anything I'm ashamed of, either."

"I *am* sorry for you, Kirke; I'm so sorry for you, I'm 'most dead," responded Molly with feeling. "What shall you do if you can't find that dress?"

"Find it? I didn't lose it, I tell you."

"But if *she* can't find it? She says you're bound to replace it. It cost twenty dollars, counting the making."

"Timothy Moses! All that? Why, it didn't weigh two pounds!"

Kirke looked very sober. He was thinking

of the silver in the little Mexican purse. If worse came to worst, he might give that to the girl. But in that case he could not buy the sewing-machine for Mrs. Carillo.

And in one sense he owed this to Mrs. Carillo ; for had she not run behind with her sewing because of Manuel's illness? And had not he himself been to blame for that illness?

"Humpty-dumpty! I wish I was a horned toad," said Kirke dismally. "I sha'n't sleep a wink to-night."

CHAPTER XII

EVERYBODY HAPPY

PAULINE had been away that evening. The next morning after breakfast Molly ran across the street to tell her about the missing dress. Though their homes were within a stone's throw of each other, the two girls lived in different wards ; and Molly attended the North School, while Pauline went to Park Street.

"The girl is a Park-Streeter. She must be in your class," said Molly at last, pausing for breath.

"Did you say she had the valedictory? Then, it's Mary Gilbraith."

"But Kirke said her name was Mary Davis. She gave him her card."

"It's pretty well if I don't know who is going to deliver our valedictory, Molly," returned Pauline, not a little piqued. "It's Mary Gilbraith. Besides, there isn't any Mary Davis in the class."

"There isn't? Queer Kirke should have made such a blunder! But, anyhow, that young lady, — Kirke thought she was Mary Davis's sister, — she looked at the card and said it was all right; and then she took that dress, and carried it off."

"How very, very strange, Molly."

"I never heard the like. Pauline Bradstreet, you don't suppose that young lady has stolen the dress!"

Pauline laughed aloud.

"O Molly! Mary Gilbraith's sister is a King's Daughter! She's too good to breathe!"

"Then what has she done with that gown? Kirke has gone down again this morning to

hunt for it; and if it was found he'd be back by this time."

"Way down to Mary Gilbraith's, Molly?"

"O Pauline! how large is this Mary Gilbraith? Do you suppose my new white mull would fit her? I do wish it would!"

"She's about your size, Molly; but if you lend her your mull, what'll you wear yourself."

"My old spotted muslin. It's too short; but my boots are pretty, and, thank fortune, I haven't the valedictory."

"O Molly! you sha'n't wear that thing. You'll look as if you were in kilts."

"Now, Pauline, you don't mean that; though I'd almost be willing to be in a strait-jacket to help that poor girl out of this bother."

"You're a love of a dear, Molly," cried Pauline, with a painful embrace; "but we must be at the Opera House in half an hour, and you can't have time to carry your gown to Mary Gilbraith. I'm glad of it!"

"Yes, I shall. I'm all ready but changing my dress; and I shall run every step of the way to Plum Street."

"*Pine* Street, you mean!" called Pauline, as Molly dashed out of the door. "The Gilbraiths live on *Pine* Street, you know."

"I should think they did, and on the very tip end of it too!" exclaimed Kirke, rushing in, panting. "I've just found that out! Such a circus as I've had!"

"*Pine* Street! Why didn't Mary Gilbraith say so when she called at our house?" cried Molly. "But have you found the dress? Oh, tell me, Kirke, *have* you found it?"

"Yes, *ma'am*! At Miss Davis's on Plum Street, where I carried the concern yesterday!" replied Kirke, fanning himself with his hat. "That girl with the red dress gave me the wrong card; that was what was the matter!"

"May Gilbraith gave you the wrong card,

Kirke? She's always mixing things," said Pauline.

"Yes; she gave me her dressmaker's card, Miss Davis's card. Miss Davis is the woman that made that everlasting gown."

"But why did the dressmaker let you leave the dress, Kirke?" asked Molly in wrath. "She must have known it wasn't *her* dress!"

"The dressmaker wasn't there. She was at Los Angeles; is there now. Had a telegram. Rushed off two-forty. It was another woman that I saw, a young woman."

"Another woman?" gasped Molly, more and more confused. "That's worse yet. What right had the other woman to touch Mary Gilbraith's dress?"

Kirke laughed till the tears came. He had not felt so light-hearted for a month.

"Why, she thought she had a right. She sews for Miss Davis, this young woman does. And when she saw the dress, she supposed

I had taken it back to Miss Davis to have it altered."

"Oh, that was it! She couldn't have asked you what you brought it back for! Oh, no!" said Molly, still angry.

"It seems not. Probably took me for an idiot. All I know is, she put that dress away on the closet-shelf, expecting Mary Gilbraith would come in a few minutes to tell what changes were to be made in it."

"I should think she might have stayed at home, then, to see Mary."

"Well; she didn't. Anyway, didn't stay long. Went off and shut up the house. You see, this young woman doesn't live with Miss Davis. She only sews at the house day-times."

"Well, I must say!" exclaimed Molly, holding up both hands.

"Say on!" cried Kirke, seizing them in his own. But instead of "saying on," Molly fell to laughing; and the others laughed with her.

“Mamma says it’s time to get ready, Molly,” cried Weezy, peeping in; and Molly hurried away to put on the pretty white mull which there was no longer any need of her lending to careless Mary Gilbraith.

But quickly as Molly ran, Kirke and Weezy reached home before her with the news that the package had been found.

It made Mr. and Mrs. Rowe very happy, almost as happy as they were the autumn afterward when Molly rescued Essie Hobbs from being run over. But that adventure must be told in another book.

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